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**Department for Work and Pensions**

**Research Report No 469**

# **Routes onto Incapacity Benefit: Findings from a survey of recent claimants**

**Peter A. Kemp and Jacqueline Davidson**

A report of research carried out by Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of Oxford and the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>CAPI</b>	Computer Aided Personal Interview
<b>DWP</b>	Department for Work and Pensions
<b>GP</b>	General Practitioner
<b>IB</b>	Incapacity Benefit
<b>IS</b>	Income Support
<b>JSA</b>	Jobseeker's Allowance
<b>NDDP</b>	New Deal for Disabled People
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>ROIB</b>	Routes onto Incapacity Benefit
<b>SME</b>	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
<b>TUC</b>	Trades Union Congress



# Summary

## 1 Introduction

- This report presents findings from an interview survey of recent claimants of Incapacity Benefit (IB). The study was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and was carried out by the University of Oxford and the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York.
- The processes by which people come to claim IB are not well understood. In order to address that knowledge gap, the DWP commissioned a qualitative study of routes onto IB. That research identified a number of routes to claiming IB (Sainsbury and Davidson 2006). First, some people had moved from a period of long-term work onto IB. Second, others moved from a period of long-term 'non-work' onto IB. And third, some people had moved through a relatively short transition from work to non-work to IB.
- The interview survey with recent claimants of IB reported here represents a second phase of the research. Its aims were to provide detailed information on the characteristics and circumstances of new claimants of IB; and to provide statistical information about the routes onto IB that were identified in the qualitative study.
- The survey involved face-to-face, structured interviews with a representative sample of 1,843 recent claimants of IB. 'Recent claimants' were defined as people who had made a new claim for IB in the previous three months. This is the same definition that was used in the qualitative phase of the research.



- The sampling strategy was designed to ensure that it provided a representative sample of recent claimants in Great Britain. It was also designed to ensure that sufficient numbers of claimants in high, medium and low areas of unemployment were included. This allowed an exploration of the routes onto IB according to local labour market demand. Areas of high unemployment were defined as being local authorities in the top quintile of the quarterly unemployment rate; areas of low unemployment were in the bottom quintile and areas of medium unemployment were in the second to the fourth quintiles of the quarterly unemployment flow.
- Interviews were carried out approximately six months after people had made their recent claim for IB. The adjusted response rate was 56 per cent.

## 2 Personal and household characteristics

- In line with the general population<sup>1</sup>, 91 per cent of recent IB claimants described their ethnic background as being white; five per cent described themselves as Asian or Asian British, two per cent as black or black British and one per cent said they were of a mixed ethnic background.
- Recent claimants were disproportionately male and drawn from older age groups. They were most likely to have been living as part of a couple with no children under the age of 18. Single people (22 per cent) and lone parents (16 per cent) were over-represented among recent IB claimants when compared with the general population (14 per cent and seven per cent respectively).
- Forty-two per cent of recent claimants were owner-occupiers; 40 per cent rented from a social housing landlord and 14 per cent rented from a private landlord. This compares with 68 per cent, 19 per cent and 11 per cent respectively among the general population.
- Recent IB claimants were twice as likely as the general population to have no academic or vocational qualifications (14 per cent compared with 28 per cent).

## 3 Employment

- Just over half of recent claimants had some connection with paid work immediately prior to their claim: 23 per cent had been in work and 33 per cent had been off sick from their job. Of those who had been working, three-quarters (75 per cent) were employees and a quarter (25 per cent) were self-employed.
- Ten per cent of respondents had been off sick with no job to return to, 19 per cent were unemployed and looking for work, nine per cent considered themselves to have been permanently off work due to sickness or disability, and six per cent had been looking after the home or care-giving, immediately prior to their recent claim.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Census 2001, in *Social Trends* (2007).

- Just under half (47 per cent) of recent claimants who were not in work or off sick at the time of interview, had worked within the previous year. Eleven per cent had not worked for ten or more years.
- The most common length of job tenure among recent claimants who were either in work or off sick from work in the week prior to interview was ten or more years.
- The most common reason for the last job coming to an end among claimants who were not in work or off sick in the week prior to interview was giving up work because of their ill-health or disability (40 per cent).
- Compared with the general population, recent IB claimants were over-represented among unskilled manual and service occupations (28 per cent), with a further 18 per cent coming from skilled trades.
- The majority of recent claimants worked in the private sector (73 per cent). Just under a quarter (23 per cent) worked for the public sector.
- Forty per cent of claimants had been employed in firms with less than 50 employees. Just over a third (35 per cent) of recent claimants had been employed in firms with over 500 employees.
- About a fifth (22 per cent) of recent claimants had been members of a trades union. Seventy-nine per cent of recent claimants had had permanent employment contracts, and just under half of claimants had worked for more than 40 hours per week.
- On the whole, recent claimants were in relatively low paid work before making their claim for IB. Among those who had been in work in the previous two years and who knew or could remember how much they were getting, 15 per cent earned less than £5,000 and 47 per cent of claimants had previously earned less than £10,000 per year.
- Seventy per cent of recent IB claimants had spent most of their working lives in steady employment.

## 4 Health and disability

- Ninety-six per cent of recent claimants of IB said either that they currently, or in the previous 12 months, had at least one health condition or disability.
- The most commonly reported health problems or disabilities were depression, stress and anxiety, or musculo-skeletal conditions. The conditions reported by men and women were broadly similar, except that more women reported having depression or stress and anxiety, while more men said they had heart problems or high blood pressure.

- Around one-fifth (21 per cent) of recent claimants reported that the major cause of their main health condition or disability was related to their work. Men were more likely than women to say that the major cause of their main health condition or disability was related to their work or the result of a household, leisure or sports accident or injury.
- Among health conditions and disabilities that were not present at birth, 58 per cent developed gradually over time and 42 per cent began suddenly.
- Among people who were in paid work or on sick leave immediately prior to their claim for IB, 78 per cent of health conditions or disabilities affected their ability to do their job.
- Among people who were not in paid work or on sick leave in the week before their survey interview, but who had worked in the past, 62 per cent reported that their health condition or disability had played a role in their most recent job coming to an end.

## 5 The role of employers

- Just under a third (30 per cent) of recent claimants who had been in paid work or on sick leave prior to their claim for IB did not discuss their condition(s) with their employer. The most common timing for those who had told their employers was after starting a job when the condition had become a problem.
- Two-thirds of those who had discussed their condition with their employer had thought them to have been either very, or fairly, helpful. A third of employees had perceived their employer to be either fairly, or very, unhelpful.
- The majority of recent claimants (71 per cent) who had been in paid work or on sick leave before their claim for IB had had no access to occupational health services through their employer.
- By far the majority of claimants (83 per cent) who had been in work or on sick leave prior to their claim for IB and had a condition which affected their ability to do their job, reported that no workplace changes had been made to help accommodate them.
- Of those for whom workplace adaptations had been made, 74 per cent thought that the changes had helped them to remain in work for longer than they otherwise would have been able to.
- Over two-thirds (69 per cent) of recent claimants who had been in paid work or on sick pay immediately prior to their claim for IB said that they had consulted people other than their employer (for example, a trades union representative, a General Practitioner (GP) or friends or relatives) about the effect of their condition on their ability to do their job.

## 6 Claiming Incapacity Benefit

- Almost two-thirds (68 per cent) of recent claimants were claiming IB for the first-time and almost a third (32 per cent) were repeat claimants.
- About three-fifths (57 per cent) of first-time claimants had been told about IB by someone and two-fifths (40 per cent) already knew about it.
- First-time claimants who had been told about IB had most commonly heard about it from Jobcentre Plus (36 per cent). Other commonly cited informants were employers (17 per cent), relatives or friends (16 per cent) and GPs (12 per cent).
- Just over half of recent claimants had either been working (23 per cent) or off sick from their job (33 per cent) immediately prior to their recent claim for IB. Two-thirds of the remainder had been getting Income Support (IS) or Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) immediately prior to their claim for IB.
- Altogether, a third (32 per cent) of all recent IB claimants had been getting IS or JSA (or both), either immediately prior to their claim or at some other point in the previous two years.
- Just over half (53 per cent) of recent claimants had moved onto IB from being in work (either working or off sick from their job). Around another quarter (26 per cent) had claimed IB from 'non-work' but had nonetheless been in work at some point in the previous two years. Just over a fifth (21 per cent) had come from non-work and had not worked for at least two years or had never worked.
- When asked how long they had initially expected to be on IB, the most common response (given by 37 per cent of recent claimants) was that they did not know. A third (33 per cent) had expected to remain on IB for less than six months. About one in ten (nine per cent) thought it would be at least a year and a similar proportion (11 per cent) did not ever expect to return to work.
- Approximately six months after their claim, just over half (53 per cent) of recent claimants were receiving IB. One in five (20 per cent) were no longer claiming IB, one in fourteen said they were still waiting for their claim to be processed (seven per cent), and the remainder (20 per cent) had had their claim rejected.

## 7 Work expectations and barriers

- By the time of their interview – approximately six months after their recent claim for IB – 14 per cent of respondents had moved into work. However, the great majority of recent claimants were either off sick, unemployed or economically inactive.
- The cohort of recent claimants of IB had become substantially more detached from the labour market in the subsequent six months, with many people having become economically inactive (that is, neither working nor looking for work).

- For example, the proportion describing themselves as permanently off work due to sickness or disability had trebled, rising from nine per cent to 27 per cent. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the respondents that said they were unemployed and looking for work immediately prior to their recent claim, they reported that they regarded themselves as being permanently off work due to sickness or disability in the week prior to the interview.
- When asked about their current and likely future work situation, only one per cent of recent claimants said they had been looking for work, but had stopped because they could not find a job. This provides little support for the view that many people on IB are 'discouraged workers' (that is, people who had given up looking for work because they could not find a job). However, a further 13 per cent said they did not expect to work in the future and it is possible that some of them may be discouraged workers.
- The proportion of people reporting that they were permanently unable to work because of their health or disability increased with age group, as did the proportion who said they did not expect to work in the future.
- Among recent claimants who were not expecting, or planning, to work in the future, two-fifths said that they were unlikely to get a job because of their health or disability.
- Many respondents who were not expecting to return to work had doubts about their employability. Thus, 14 per cent of them believed there were insufficient jobs in their area for people with their skills; 12 per cent said they did not have the right qualifications or experience to find work; 14 per cent believed they were unlikely to get a job because of their age; and 13 per cent thought that employers would not give them a job because of their sickness record.
- Twenty-one per cent of recent claimants had either literacy problems, numeracy problems or both.
- Recent IB recipients were less likely to have had a driving licence or access to a car than the general population. Fifty-six per cent of recent IB claimants had a full, current driving licence, of which 82 per cent had access to a car. Thus, in total, 46 per cent of recent claimants had both a driving licence and access to a car.
- Men (63 per cent) were more likely than women (45 per cent) to have a full driving licence. The figures for Britain as a whole in 2005 were 81 per cent and 63 per cent respectively.

# 1 Introduction

This report presents findings from an interview survey of recent claimants of Incapacity Benefit (IB). The study was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and was carried out by the University of Oxford and the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York, with fieldwork conducted by Ipsos MORI.

## 1.1 Policy background

The number of people in Britain claiming incapacity benefits sharply increased between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s, rising from 0.7 million to 2.6 million over that period (DWP, 2006).<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, the number of claimants continued to rise, albeit much more slowly, until 2003, since when it has fallen to below the level in 1997. Currently, 2.67 million people or 7.5 per cent of the working age population are claiming incapacity benefits (DWP, 2007).

Thus although employment has increased and unemployment has fallen since the mid-1990s, the number of people claiming incapacity benefits remains very high. However, Britain is not alone in having a high proportion of the working age population claiming incapacity benefits. Most of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries share this problem to a greater or lesser extent and all of them are finding it difficult to achieve significant reductions in their caseloads (OECD, 2003; Kemp *et al.*, 2006).

A high IB caseload has implications for social exclusion and public expenditure, but also for the performance of the economy. In the face of population ageing and global economic competition, the Government has set the goal of raising the employment rate to 80 per cent. Achieving this demanding target is likely to require a reduction of about one million in the number of people claiming incapacity benefits (DWP, 2007). Such a large reduction will in turn require a significant fall in the number of new claimants and a substantial increase in the numbers leaving incapacity benefits.

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'incapacity benefits' refers to IB, including National Insurance 'credit only' cases, and Income Support (IS) awarded on the grounds of disability.

The Government has introduced a number of initiatives that are aimed at helping IB claimants to take up work. The New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP), which was introduced as a pilot programme in 1999 and extended nationally in 2001, helped 130,000 people to move into paid work. More recently, the Pathways to Work scheme was introduced in the areas that have the highest concentrations of people on IB. The scheme will be extended nationally by October 2008, at which point incapacity benefits for new claimants will be replaced by a new Employment and Support Allowance (DWP, 2006).

Research by the Policy Studies Institute suggests that Pathways significantly increased the probability of being employed about a year and a half after the initial benefits enquiry by 7.4 percentage points. In addition, the results indicated that Pathways reduced the probability of claiming incapacity benefits in the first six months following the start of a claim and that this effect slowly declined thereafter to a sustained level of about 1-1.5 percentage points (Bewley *et al.*, 2007).

The evaluation studies of the NDDP, Pathways to Work and other initiatives have shed much light on the characteristics of people entering these programmes compared with the stock of claimants. They have also increased knowledge of the factors that may help or hinder people from leaving IB and taking up paid work.

However, much less information is available about people newly claiming IB and especially about their routes or pathways onto these benefits. Research has been undertaken on concentrations of male incapacity benefits claimants, especially in coalfield and old industrial areas of the country, which has highlighted the importance of local labour market conditions (Beatty and Fothergill, 1996; Alcock *et al.*, 2003).

It has also been suggested that unemployment benefit officers in the 1980s may have actively encouraged older, unemployed people to claim IB in order to help contain the rising numbers of registered unemployed claimants (Adams, 1999). Meanwhile, research has indicated that General Practitioners (GPs) may be more willing to sign off as sick older, unemployed workers if they appear to have little prospect of ever finding another job (Ritchie *et al.*, 1993; Legard *et al.*, 2002).

Qualitative research has shown that people's ill-health and access to appropriate and timely health care and rehabilitation services has an impact on whether or not they come to claim or remain on IB (Hedges and Sykes, 2001). Other studies have pointed out that people who are affected by poor health, injury or disability risk losing their employment. Thus the role of the employer in facilitating job retention and rehabilitation (Trades Union Congress (TUC) 2002) is also an important factor in whether and how people will go on to claim IB.

However, the processes by which people come to claim IB in the first instance are not well understood. In order to address that knowledge gap, the DWP commissioned a qualitative study of routes onto IB. That research identified a number of routes to claiming IB (Sainsbury and Davidson 2006). First, some people had moved from a period of long-term work onto IB. Second, others moved from a period of long-



term 'non-work' onto IB. And third, some people had moved through a relatively short transition from work to non-work to IB.

The findings to emerge from that research pointed to the importance of understanding people's labour market opportunities, their health conditions, access to health care and their friends and family as important factors that may affect the process of claiming IB.

The present research was commissioned by DWP to complement the previous, qualitative study in order to provide quantitative information about new IB claimants and to further our understanding of the processes associated with claiming this benefit.

## 1.2 Aims of the research

The interview survey was carried out with recent claimants of IB and its main aims were to provide:

- detailed information on the characteristics and circumstances of new claimants of IB;
- statistical information about the routes onto IB that were identified in the qualitative interviews.

## 1.3 Research methods

The survey involved face-to-face, structured interviews with a representative sample of 1,843 recent claimants of IB. 'Recent claimants' were defined as people who had made a new claim for IB in the previous three months. This is the same definition as that used in the qualitative phase of the research.

The questionnaire was designed by the research team in consultation with DWP. The topics included in the questionnaire were:

- household details;
- income and housing tenure;
- educational and vocational qualifications;
- employment history and current/most recent employment;
- IB claim history;
- health history and current health status/problems;
- employer details;
- impact of health problems on employment;
- response of employer to health problems;



- expectations about future employment;
- barriers to work.

The questionnaire was piloted with 30 recent claimants of IB in one Jobcentre Plus District in England in order to test it for comprehension, content and length. Some small revisions were then made to the final research instrument in consultation with DWP.

The sampling strategy was designed to ensure that it provided a representative sample of recent claimants in Great Britain. It was also designed to ensure that sufficient numbers of claimants in high, medium and low areas of unemployment were included. The aim of the latter was to facilitate an exploration of the routes onto IB according to local labour market demand, the importance of which has long been argued (Alcock *et al.*, 2003). For our purposes, areas of high unemployment were defined as being local authorities in the top quintile of the quarterly unemployment rate; areas of low unemployment were in the bottom quintile and areas of medium unemployment were in the second to the fourth quintiles of the quarterly unemployment rate. Table 1.1 shows the achieved sample distribution by region and unemployment level.

**Table 1.1    Achieved sample distribution by region and unemployment level**

	<i>N</i>
Total	1,843
<b>Region</b>	
North England – North East, North West, Yorkshire/Humberside	409
Central England – East Midlands, West Midlands, East of England	440
South England – South West, South East, London	662
Scotland	172
Wales	160
<b>Unemployment level</b>	
High	663
Medium	588
Low	592

The fieldwork was completed by the survey firm Ipsos MORI. Interviews were conducted at various times throughout the week – including evenings and weekends – in respondents’ homes using CAPI (Computer Aided Personal Interviews). Potential participants were first sent a letter inviting them to participate in the survey. They were also informed about the research and its purpose as well as how their details had been obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity was assured and they were given the opportunity to opt out of the study at that stage. Interviews were carried out approximately six months after people had made their recent claim for IB.

The unadjusted response rate was 47 per cent. When account is taken of invalid addresses (e.g. non-residential properties), ineligible respondents, people who had moved away and those who were too ill to be interviewed, the adjusted response rate was 56 per cent. Because of the way that the DWP benefits database is compiled, some very short claims (less than six weeks) will be under-represented in the survey.

The data was weighted to take into account response bias and to correct for the over-sampling of areas of low unemployment and under-sampling of areas of medium and high unemployment that had been undertaken in order to ensure there were sufficient number of interviews for analysis by unemployment level. In practice, the weighting had only a small impact on the sample bases for the tables. In order to avoid cluttering up the tables, it was therefore decided to include only the weighted bases in the report. All differences described in the text are statistically significant.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that the figures presented in this report are not always directly comparable with those in the reports of the evaluation of the NDDP. The Routes onto Incapacity Benefit (ROIB) survey is a representative sample of recent claimants. It includes claimants who were being paid IB when the sample was drawn, but who may subsequently find that their application is rejected once their Personal Capability Assessment has been completed. In contrast, the NDDP Survey of Eligible Population, Wave One, was based on the flow of **successful** claimants who had also received a letter inviting them to participate in the programme. For that reason it was not a representative sample of all new claimants, but it did not need to be for the purpose of that evaluation (Woodward *et al.*, 2003). In addition, whereas the ROIB survey was based on a face-to-face, 45 minute interview, the NDDP wave one eligible population survey involved a 20 minute telephone interview. This difference may also account for some of the attitudinal differences found between the surveys, as the face-to-face approach allows more time for questions to be asked, explained and answered than do telephone interviews.

In addition, it should be noted that the health condition classification used for this report is based on the one used by DWP for social surveys. It is not the same as that used by DWP for administrative purposes. Moreover, the former is based on respondent's self-reporting of their health conditions, while the administrative data are based on diagnoses made by doctors. Consequently, the health condition data in this report are not directly comparable to that presented in DWP's administrative statistics on IB claimants.

## 1.4 Structure of the report

**Chapter 2** presents the personal and household characteristics of recent IB claimants. It describes their gender, ethnicity, age and household type before

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<sup>3</sup> At the 95 per cent confidence level or higher.

looking at housing tenure, length of residence in their local authority area and, finally, their educational and vocational qualifications. It compares some of these attributes with those found in the general population of Great Britain.

**Chapter 3** looks at the employment history and current labour market circumstances of recent claimants. It outlines peoples' employment situation both prior to their claim and at the time of interview, considers when they were last in paid work and the nature of that work.

**Chapter 4** focuses on health. It looks at whether recent claimants had a health condition or disability that affected their everyday activities, the nature of their condition(s) and their perception of the cause of their condition. It also considers whether their health was improving or getting worse, whether they were waiting for medical treatment, and whether their health condition or disability affected their ability to perform the job (if any) they were doing prior to their claim or played a role in their most recent job coming to an end.

**Chapter 5** examines how employers responded to people whose health condition or disability had affected their ability to do their job. It considers whether and when an employer was informed about a claimant's condition, before moving on to discuss how helpful they were in facilitating workplace changes in order to help employees remain in work for longer. The chapter also considers whether people had access to occupational health services and advice from key actors such as GPs and trades unions.

**Chapter 6** explores the background to people's recent claim for IB. It looks at whether they were first-time or repeat claimants, their awareness of this benefit, their work and benefit status prior to their claim, how long they initially expected to remain on IB and whether they were receiving IB at the time of their interview. It quantifies the three main routes onto IB identified in the qualitative study.

**Chapter 7** focuses on recent claimants' expectations about paid work and on barriers to work. In particular it looks at people's current employment situation and how this compared with their situation immediately prior to the recent claim, their work aspirations and expectations, perceived barriers to work (such as age, health and skills), literacy and numeracy problems, and whether they had a full driving licence and access to a car.

**Chapter 8** concludes the report by summarising the major findings and drawing out the implications for policy.

## 2 Personal and household characteristics

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes some of the key characteristics and circumstances of the people who had recently claimed Incapacity Benefit (IB). It first outlines their gender, ethnic background and household type before discussing whether they had a partner and, if they did, their partner's employment situation. The chapter then moves on to consider housing tenure and length of residence in their local authority area, before examining educational and vocational qualifications.

### 2.2 Summary

- In line with the general population, 91 per cent of recent IB claimants described their ethnic background as being white; five per cent described themselves as Asian or Asian British, two per cent as black or black British and one per cent said they were of a mixed ethnic background.
- Recent claimants were disproportionately male and drawn from older age groups. They were most likely to have been living as part of a couple with no children under the age of 18. Single people (22 per cent) and lone parents (16 per cent) were over-represented among recent IB claimants when compared with the general population (14 per cent and seven per cent respectively).
- Forty-two per cent of recent claimants were owner-occupiers; 40 per cent rented from a social housing landlord and 14 per cent rented from a private landlord. This compares with 68 per cent, 19 per cent and 11 per cent respectively among the general population.
- Recent IB claimants were twice as likely as the general population to have had no academic or vocational qualifications (14 per cent compared with 28 per cent).

## 2.3 Personal characteristics

Table 2.1 shows the gender, age and ethnic background of recent IB claimants and comparable data for the general population.

Three-fifths of recent IB claimants were male and two-fifths were female. This gender balance among recent claimants differs from that of the general population of working age people (16 to 64), among whom half are male and half are female. Recent IB claimants also have an older age profile compared with the general population. About half of recent claimants, but only two-fifths of the general population, are aged 45 and over (Table 2.1). The mean age of recent IB claimants was 42 and the median was 44.

**Table 2.1 Characteristics of recent Incapacity Benefit claimants**

	Recent claimants %	General population %
<b>Gender+</b>		
Men	59	50
Women	41	50
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,843</i>	
<b>*Age group+</b>		
16 to 24	14	17
25 to 34	16	22
35 to 44	21	23
45 to 54	26	21
55+	23	17
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,836</i>	
<b>**Ethnic background~</b>		
White	92	92
Mixed	1	1
Asian or Asian British	5	4
Black or Black British	2	2
Other	1	1
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,843</i>	

\* Source: Office for National Statistics; Government Actuary's Department; General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Population estimates for mid-2005 based on results of the 2001 Census updated to account for subsequent births, deaths, net migration and other changes, in *Social Trends* (2007).

\*\* Source: Census 2001, in *Social Trends* (2007).

+ UK. ~ Great Britain.

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

Ninety-one per cent of recent IB claimants described their ethnic background as being white (89 per cent describing themselves as white British). Five per cent described themselves as Asian or Asian British, two per cent as black or black British and one per cent said they had a mixed ethnic background. These figures are very close to those found in the general population in Great Britain from the 2001 Census.

Although there were more male than female recent IB claimants, the gender balance varied across age groups. Among the 45 to 54 age group, men only slightly outnumbered women. In the younger age groups, men generally accounted for three-fifths of recent claimants and women for two-fifths. In the oldest age group (55+), men accounted for two-thirds and women for a third of claimants; but the higher proportion of men reflects the older State Pension age for them compared with women (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2 Gender and age of recent Incapacity Benefit claimants**

	<b>16-24</b> %	<b>25-34</b> %	<b>35-44</b> %	<b>45-54</b> %	<b>55+</b> %
Men	57	60	58	52	68
Women	43	41	42	48	32
Total	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>265</i>	<i>284</i>	<i>390</i>	<i>473</i>	<i>424</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

## 2.4 Household characteristics

Table 2.3 shows that recent IB claimants were most likely to have been living as part of a couple with no children under 18 years of age (26 per cent). Compared to the general population in Great Britain (14 per cent), single people of working age (22 per cent) were over-represented amongst recent IB claimants. Lone parents were also over-represented among recent claimants (16 per cent) compared with the general population (seven per cent) (Social Trends 2007<sup>4</sup>).

<sup>4</sup> See Table 2.3, data compiled from multiple sources: the Census, Labour Force Survey and the Office for National Statistics.

**Table 2.3    Household type of recent Incapacity Benefit claimants**

	%
Lives alone	22
Single but not alone	15
Lone parent with children under 19	16
Couple with no children	26
Couple with children under 19	21
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,835</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents.

Recent female IB claimants were slightly less likely to live alone (20 per cent) than were men (23 per cent). Women were also less likely to be ‘single but living with other adults’ (12 per cent) than men (18 per cent). They were also more likely than men to be a lone parent with children or young people at home (25 per cent compared with 11 per cent).

Table 2.4 shows that recent claimants in the older age groups were more likely than younger ones to live alone. The proportion that was single but not living alone, however, decreased with age. Two out of five recent claimants aged under 25, and one in five of those aged between 25 and 44, were lone parents. Couples with children under 19 were mainly concentrated in the 25 to 44 age group and couples without children living with them were concentrated among people aged over 44.

**Table 2.4    Household type by age group**

	16-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55+ %
Lives alone	10	17	22	28	24
Single but not alone	30	24	15	9	7
Lone parent with children under 19	41	19	19	11	4
Couple with no children	4	10	10	34	56
Couple with children under 19	15	30	34	17	9
Total	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>264</i>	<i>284</i>	<i>391</i>	<i>472</i>	<i>423</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents.

Three-fifths (60 per cent) of recent IB claimants reported that they had a partner who normally lived with them. Sixty-four per cent of men and 54 per cent of women had partners, proportions that were not dissimilar from the general population (63 per cent of men compared with 59 per cent of women, according to the 2005 General Household Survey).

**Table 2.5 Partner's employment situation the week prior to interview**

	%
Employed in work	50
Off sick from work	4
Self-employed in work	4
Self-employed but not in work due to sickness	2
Temporarily sick or injured, no job to return to	1
Permanently off work because of sickness or disability	6
Unemployed and looking for work	5
Looking after children or the home	11
Caring for someone who is frail, sick or disabled	2
Caring for me	4
Retired	8
Other	5
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>860</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents who usually lived with a partner.

Among IB claimants with partners, 50 per cent reported that their partners were in paid employment and four per cent in self-employment. In addition, six per cent were off sick from their employment or self-employment. Eleven per cent were looking after children or the home, while six per cent were caring either for the recent claimant or someone else who was frail, sick or disabled (Table 2.5). The employment status of recent claimants themselves is examined in the next chapter.

In line with traditional gender divisions, women's partners were more likely to have been in paid work (64 per cent) than were men's (47 per cent) in the week prior to the interview. In the same vein, recent male IB claimants were also more likely to report that their partner was looking after children or the home (24 per cent) than were female claimants (five per cent). Meanwhile, women were more likely to report that their partner was unemployed and looking for work (seven per cent) than were men (three per cent).

Older recent claimants were more likely than younger ones to have a partner and their partners were more likely to be in work. For instance, almost half of recent



claimants aged over 54 had a partner in work, but the same was true of less than one in ten people aged under 25 (Table 2.6).

**Table 2.6** Partner’s employment situation by age group

	16-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55+ %
Working	8	25	34	51	47
Not working	14	23	23	22	39
No partner	79	52	43	28	15
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Base	237	234	305	340	320

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents who usually lived with a partner.

## 2.5 Housing tenure and length of residence

Recent IB claimants were much less likely than the wider British population to be owner occupiers (42 per cent compared with 68 per cent) (General Household Survey 2005). Some 27 per cent were buying their house with a mortgage and 15 per cent owned it outright. Conversely, whilst 19 per cent of the general population rent from a social landlord, 12 per cent from a local authority and seven per cent from a housing association, recent IB claimants were nearly twice as likely to rent from a social landlord (40 per cent, of whom 25 per cent rented from a local authority landlord and 15 per cent from a housing association). Meanwhile, 14 per cent of recent IB claimants rented from a private landlord (compared with 11 per cent of the general population) and four per cent had some other arrangement (Table 2.7).

**Table 2.7** Housing tenure

	%
Owned with a mortgage	27
Owned outright	15
Rented from local authority	25
Rented from Housing Association	15
Rented from private landlord	14
Some other arrangement	4
Refused or DK	1
Total	100
Base	1,843

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents.

Partly reflecting stages in the lifecycle, there was an association between housing tenure and age. Recent IB claimants over 55 were the most likely to be owner occupiers (67 per cent). People aged under 35 were the least likely to be owner occupiers (29 per cent). Recent IB claimants living in the owner occupied sector were more likely to have partners in work (52 per cent) than those in the social housing (20 per cent) or private renting sectors (21 per cent).

**Table 2.8 Length of time in local authority area by housing tenure**

	Owned %	Social rented %	Private rented %
Less than 12 months	3	5	13
12 months but less than 2 years	2	5	10
2 years but less than 3 years	3	5	9
3 years but less than 5 years	5	9	9
5 years but less than 10 years	10	16	11
10 or more years	77	61	48
Total	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>771</i>	<i>733</i>	<i>255</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

Recent IB claimants who were owner occupiers were the most likely to have lived in their local authority area for over ten years and the least likely to have moved into their area in recent years. People who rented from a private landlord were the most likely to have moved in the previous 12 months (Table 2.8).

The most geographically mobile age group were claimants aged between 25 and 34. They were the least likely age group to have lived in the same local authority area for ten or more years (46 per cent). The least mobile were people aged 45-55 (71 per cent) and those aged 55 and above (80 per cent).

## 2.6 Educational and vocational qualifications

Work-related skills and qualifications are critically important for people's labour market prospects. About two-fifths (44 per cent) of recent claimants had academic qualifications from school, college or university; and a similar proportion (43 per cent) had work-related or professional qualifications. As Table 2.9 shows, 23 per cent of recent claimants had only academic qualifications, 22 per cent had only work-related qualifications and 21 per cent had both academic and work-related qualifications. Around one in three (34 per cent) recent IB claimants had no

academic, vocational or professional qualifications. This compares with only one in seven (14 per cent) in the general population (Social Trends, 2007<sup>5</sup>).

**Table 2.9 Educational and vocational qualifications**

	%
Academic qualifications only	23
Work-related qualifications only	22
Both academic and work-related qualifications	21
No qualifications	34
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,843</i>

Column percentages.

Base: all respondents.

Of those with academic qualifications, 27 per cent had at least higher grades (A, B or C) of 'O' levels or their equivalent; 14 per cent had lower grades (D or E) of 'O' levels or their equivalent, and 11 per cent had a university degree or its equivalent (Table 2.10). The proportion of those holding a degree amongst recent claimants is lower than in the general population (18 per cent according to Social Trends 2007<sup>6</sup>).

**Table 2.10 Highest academic qualification**

	%
Degree or equivalent qualification	11
GCE 'A' level/ Higher School Certificate/ SCE Higher Grade	9
GCSE grades A,B,C/ GCE 'O' level grades A, B, C/ CSE grade 1/ SCE Ordinary grade A-C	28
GSCE grades D-E/ GCE 'O' level grades D-E/ CSE grades 2-5/ SCE Ordinary grade D-E	14
Other	11
None of these	27
Don't know/can't remember	1
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,212</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents with qualifications.

<sup>5</sup> Annual Population Survey, 2005, January to December, in Social Trends 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Annual Population Survey, 2005, January to December, in Social Trends 2007.

Recent IB recipients had a diverse range of work-related qualifications. Twenty per cent of recent IB claimants had a work-related National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)/Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) qualification. Eleven per cent had a recognised trade apprenticeship and many had City and Guilds qualifications (Table 2.11).

**Table 2.11 Work-related qualifications**

	%
Recognised trade apprenticeship	11
City and Guilds-Craft Intermediate/Ordinary	17
City and Guilds-Advanced/Final or Full Technological	10
BEC/TEC/BTEC/SCOTBE/SCOTEC/SCOTVEC/National/General	5
BEC/TEC/BTEC/SCOTBE/SCOTVEC/Higher	2
Ordinary National Cert/Dip (ONC/OND)	2
Higher National Cert/Dip(HNC/HND)	5
RSA/Putman's secretarial or clerical	5
Other clerical/commercial qualification	3
NVQ/SVQ	20
GNVQ/GSVQ	3
Nursing qualification	2
Teaching qualification (inc TEFL)	4
Foreign professional or work-related qualifications	4
Other	17
None of these	23
Don't know	*
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,212</i>

\* Less than 0.5%. Row percentages. Respondents could mention more than one qualification.  
Base: all respondents with work-related qualifications.

Table 2.12 shows that female recent IB claimants more often reported having an academic qualification than did their male counterparts, but less often reported having a work-related qualification. They were also slightly more likely than men to report having no qualifications. In the general population, the proportions having no academic or vocational qualifications is much lower (15 per cent of women and 14 per cent of men, according to Social Trends 2007<sup>7</sup>).

<sup>7</sup> Annual Population Survey, 2005, January to December, in Social Trends 2007.

Table 2.12 Qualifications, by gender

	Female %	Male %
Academic qualifications	50	40
Work-related qualifications	36	48
No qualifications	36	33
Base	757	1,086

Row percentages.  
Base: all respondents.

The proportions of recent IB claimants having some kind of academic qualifications declined with age, falling from 59 per cent among people aged 16-24 years and 62 per cent among those aged 25 to 34, to 31 per cent among those aged over 54. By contrast, the proportion of recent IB claimants reporting that they had a work-related qualification rose with age, from 21 per cent of people aged 16-24 years, to 51 per cent among those aged over 54. Those least often reporting that they had no qualifications were people aged 25-34 (26 per cent); otherwise around a third of the other age groups reported having no qualifications (Table 2.13).

Table 2.13 Qualifications of recent Incapacity Benefit claimants by age

	16-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55+ %
Academic qualifications	59	62	46	35	31
Work-related qualifications	21	43	45	48	51
No qualifications	34	26	34	37	37
Base	302	373	488	562	507

Row percentages.  
Base: all respondents.

People living in the private rented sector were most likely to report having an academic qualification (51 per cent). Those living in the social rented sector on the other hand were least likely to report having an academic qualification (37 per cent). Claimants living in the owner occupied sector were more likely to report having a work-related qualification (52 per cent) and again, people in the social rented sector least often reported having a work-related qualification (35 per cent). Recent claimants in the social rented sector were also more likely to report having no qualifications (45 per cent) than were people in owner occupied (26 per cent) or private rented (28 per cent) housing.

The possession of academic qualifications did not vary significantly by level of unemployment in the local authority area. However, people living in areas of high unemployment (37 per cent) were significantly less likely to report having a work-related qualification than were those in medium or low unemployment areas (47 per cent in both). Respondents in high unemployment areas were also more likely to report having no qualifications (39 per cent) than people in medium (32 per cent) or low (29 per cent) unemployment areas.

While the possession of academic qualifications did not vary according to recent claimants' employment situation immediately prior to their claim, the prevalence of work-related qualifications did vary significantly. People who had been in work or were off sick from their job prior to their claim were more likely than other recent claimants to have had work-related qualifications. People looking after children or the home or caring for others were the least likely to possess work-related qualifications (Table 2.14).

Recent claimants who worked for employers with less than 50 employees were less likely than people working for larger employers to report having academic qualifications. Those working for employers with less than ten employees were the least likely to have work-related qualifications and the most likely to say that they had no qualifications. People who worked for employers with 1,000 or more workers, on the other hand, were the most likely to have academic or work-related qualifications and the least likely to report having no qualifications.

**Table 2.14 Qualifications by work situation prior to claiming Incapacity Benefit**

	Employment status immediately prior to claim					
	In employment or self- employment %	Off sick from job %	Permanently off work due to sickness or disability %	Unemployed and looking for work %	Looking after children or home or care giving %	Other %
Academic qualifications	43	46	35	47	42	45
Work-related qualifications	49	49	40	42	15	20
No qualifications	30	30	43	35	52	47
<i>Base</i>	<i>422</i>	<i>690</i>	<i>167</i>	<i>348</i>	<i>107</i>	<i>109</i>

Column percentages.

Base: all respondents.

Recent IB claimants who had worked for the public sector were most likely to have both academic and work-related qualifications. People who worked for the private sector were the most likely to report having no qualifications (Table 2.15).

Table 2.15 Qualifications by employment sector

	Private employer %	Public employer %	Other or don't know %
Academic qualifications	45	56	51
Work-related qualifications	44	55	47
No qualifications	32	25	27
Base	890	279	55

Column percentages.  
Base: all respondents who had worked or were working.

## 3 Employment

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at recent Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants' employment history, starting with their employment status immediately prior to their claim. It goes on to look at differences between IB claimants in the length of previous employment and the reasons for their jobs coming to an end, before considering their type of work, organisational sector, size of employer and whether they were union members or not. The chapter ends by outlining differences in working hours, earnings, nature of employment contracts and work histories.

### 3.2 Summary

- Just over half of recent claimants had some connection with paid work immediately prior to their claim: 23 per cent had been in work and 33 per cent had been off sick from their job. Of those who had been working, three-quarters (75 per cent) were employees and a quarter (25 per cent) were self-employed.
- Ten per cent of respondents had been off sick with no job to return to, 19 per cent were unemployed and looking for work, nine per cent considered themselves to have been permanently off work due to sickness or disability, and six per cent had been looking after the home or care-giving, immediately prior to their recent claim.
- Just under half (47 per cent) of recent claimants who were not in work or off sick at the time of interview had worked within the previous year. Eleven per cent had not worked for ten or more years.
- The most common length of job tenure among recent claimants who were either in work or off sick from work in the week prior to interview was ten or more years.
- Among claimants who were not in work or off sick in the week prior to interview, there was a wide range of reasons why their last job came to an end. The most common reason was giving up work because of their ill-health or disability (40 per cent).



- Compared with the general population, recent IB claimants were over-represented among unskilled manual and service occupations (28 per cent), with a further 18 per cent coming from skilled trades.
- The majority of recent claimants worked in the private sector (73 per cent). Just under a quarter (23 per cent) worked for the public sector.
- Thirty-seven per cent of claimants had been employed in firms with less than 50 employees. Just over a quarter (27 per cent) of recent claimants had been employed in firms with over 1,000 employees.
- About a fifth (22 per cent) of recent claimants had been members of a trades union. Seventy-nine per cent of recent claimants had had permanent employment contracts, and just under half of claimants had worked for more than 40 hours per week.
- On the whole, recent claimants were in relatively low paid work before making their claim for IB. Among those who knew or could remember, 15 per cent of claimants had previously earned less than £5,000 and 47 per cent earned less than £10,000 per year.
- Seventy per cent of recent IB claimants had spent most of their working lives in steady employment.

### 3.3 Employment situation prior to claim

The first column of data in Table 3.1 shows the employment status of recent IB claimants immediately prior to their claim. Just over half of recent claimants had some connection to paid work: 23 per cent had been in work and 33 per cent had been on sick leave from their work. Among those who had been in work, three-quarters (75 per cent) were employees and a quarter (25 per cent) were self-employed. Nine per cent of recent claimants considered themselves as having been permanently off work due to sickness or disability and four per cent said that they had been temporarily sick or injured with no job to return to. Nineteen per cent said they had been unemployed and looking for work or on a government training scheme, and six per cent had been looking after children or the home or care giving (Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1    Employment situation immediately prior to claiming Incapacity Benefit**

	<b>All claimants %</b>	<b>Non-rejected claimants %</b>
In employment or self-employment+	23	24
Off sick from job	33	35
Temporarily sick or injured – no job to return to	4	4
Permanently off work due to sickness or disability	9	9
Unemployed and looking for work*	19	18
Looking after children or the home or care giving	6	5
Other	6	5
Total	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,843</i>	<i>1,468</i>

+ 17 per cent were employees and six per cent were self-employed.

\* including those on a government training scheme.

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

As described in Chapter 6 (Section 6.8), respondents were asked whether they were receiving IB at the time of the interview. One in five (20 per cent) said they were not receiving IB because their claim had been rejected.<sup>8</sup> The second column of data in Table 3.1 shows the employment situation immediately prior to claiming, of those people who did not say that their claim had been rejected when asked in the interview if they were receiving IB now. As is clear from the table, their employment situation was similar to that for the sample of recent claimants as a whole.

Male claimants were more likely to have been working (employed or self-employed) immediately prior to claiming IB (26 per cent) than were women (18 per cent). However, women were more likely to have been on sick leave from work (37 per cent) than were men (31 per cent), perhaps reflecting the fact that they were more likely to be public sector workers (see below). Male claimants were more likely to have been unemployed and looking for work (23 per cent) than were their female counterparts (14 per cent). Again, in line with gendered divisions of labour, recent female claimants were more likely to have been looking after children or the home or care giving (12 per cent) than their male counterparts (two per cent) (Table 3.2).

<sup>8</sup> This may occur where the claimant 'fails' their Personal Capability Assessment, which may on occasion take place some months after the initial claim.

**Table 3.2    Employment situation prior to claiming Incapacity Benefit, by gender**

	Women %	Men %
In employment or self-employment	18	26
Off sick from job	37	31
Temporarily sick or injured – no job to return to	4	5
Permanently off work due to sickness or disability	9	9
Unemployed and looking for work*	14	23
Looking after children or the home or care giving	12	2
Other	8	5
Total	100	100
Base	757	1,086

\* including those on a government training scheme  
Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents.

The employment status of recent claimants in the week before their interview varied according to age. Older recent IB claimants were more likely to have been on sick leave from their work (employment or self-employment) than younger ones (43 per cent of those who were 45-55 compared with 26 per cent of 16-24 year olds). The proportion of recent IB claimants who considered themselves as permanently off work because of sickness or disability increased with age (19 per cent of those aged 16-24 compared to 31 per cent of those aged 55 and above). Those most likely to have been in paid work immediately prior to their claim for IB were aged 35-44 years (17 per cent). This compares with 12 per cent among both 16-24 year olds and 25-34 year olds. People aged 16 to 24 were the most likely to have been unemployed and looking for work the week prior to interview (21 per cent) and those aged 25-34 were the most likely to have been looking after children or the home or care giving (Table 3.3).

**Table 3.3 Employment situation prior to claiming Incapacity Benefit, by age**

	16-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55+ %
In employment or self-employment	12	12	17	13	13
Off sick from job	26	36	41	43	42
Permanently off work due to sickness or disability	19	26	27	30	31
Unemployed and looking for work*	21	11	6	7	6
Looking after children or the home or care giving	9	11	6	2	2
Other	14	5	3	6	7
Total	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>265</i>	<i>285</i>	<i>390</i>	<i>473</i>	<i>424</i>

\* including those on a government training scheme

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: 1,837 respondents.

Recent claimants who were owner occupiers were more likely to have been working immediately prior to claiming IB (18 per cent) than were people who lived in social rented housing (nine per cent) or the private rented sector (13 per cent). Respondents in the social rented sector were more likely to have been permanently off work due to sickness or disability (32 per cent) than private tenants (27 per cent) or owner occupiers (24 per cent). Recent claimants who were owner occupiers were less likely to have been looking after children or the home or care-giving (three per cent) than people in the social (seven per cent) or private (seven per cent) rented sectors (Table 3.4).

**Table 3.4 Employment situation prior to claiming Incapacity Benefit, by housing tenure**

	Owner occupied %	Social rented %	Private rented %
In employment or self-employment	18	9	13
Off sick from job	42	36	40
Permanently off work due to sickness or disability	24	32	27
Unemployed and looking for work or on a government training scheme	8	10	8
Looking after children or the home or care giving	3	7	7
Other	5	7	5
Total	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>771</i>	<i>732</i>	<i>257</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: 1,766 respondents.

### 3.4 Length of time since last in paid employment

Table 3.5 shows that, in total, just under half of recent IB claimants who were not working or off sick from their job in the week prior to interview had last worked within the previous year. Altogether, 63 per cent had last worked within the previous two years. Eleven per cent had not worked for ten or more years and seven per cent had never worked.

**Table 3.5 Length of time since last in paid employment**

	%
Less than 1 month	1
1 month but less than 2 months	1
2 months but less than 3 months	2
3 months but less than 6 months	15
6 months but less than a year	28
1 year but less than 2 years	16
2 years but less than 3 years	8
3 years but less than 5 years	6
5 years but less than 10 years	5
10 or more years	11
Never worked	7
Don't know/can't remember	1
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,196</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents who were not in paid work or off on sick pay or self-employed/off sick the week before interview.

Female claimants were more likely than their male counterparts to have never worked (nine per cent compared with five per cent) and to have been out of the labour market for ten or more years (14 per cent compared with eight per cent). However, they were more likely than men to have worked within the previous two to three months (six per cent compared to three per cent of males).

Owner occupiers who were neither in work nor off sick from their job in the week before interview, were more likely to have last worked in the past six months (24 per cent) than people in the private rented (20 per cent) or social housing (15 per cent) sectors. Respondents in social rented housing were more likely (17 per cent) to have had their last job over ten years ago than were respondents in the private rented sector (six per cent) or in owner occupation (four per cent) (Table 3.6).

**Table 3.6** Length of time since last in paid employment, by housing tenure

	Owner occupied %	Social rented %	Private rented %
Less than 6 months	24	15	20
6 months but less than 1 year	32	25	28
1 year but less than 2 years	20	14	15
2 years but less than 10 years	16	20	23
Ten or more years	4	17	6
Never worked	4	8	8
Total	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>405</i>	<i>551</i>	<i>176</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents who were not in paid work or off on sick pay or self-employed/off sick the week before interview.

### 3.5 Length of job tenure

Table 3.7 shows how long people had been in their current or most recent job. The first column provides figures for people who were either in work or off sick from a job that they had in the previous week. The second column presents the figures for the most recent job held by people who were neither in work nor off sick from their job in the previous week. The four per cent of recent claimants who had never worked are not included in the table. The third column shows the equivalent data for the general population, according to the Labour Force Survey (2002).

Taking the first two columns together, about a quarter (26 per cent) of recent IB claimants had been in their current or most recent job for less than six months. At the other extreme, around a fifth (22 per cent) had worked for ten or more years and over a quarter (28 per cent) had worked for between two and ten years in that job. By comparison, only ten per cent of the general population of working age people had been in their current job for less than six months, while two-thirds (66 per cent) had worked for two or more years. Thus, the job tenure of recent claimants of IB tends to be shorter than that of the general population.

The main difference between recent claimants who currently had a job (at which they were working or from which they were off sick) and those who did not, is that the former were much more likely to have worked in the same job for ten or more years. Meanwhile, the latter were more likely to have worked in their most recent job for between six months and two years. Altogether, 40 per cent of people who had a job, compared with 50 per cent who did not, had worked for less than two years in their current or most recent job respectively (Table 3.7).

**Table 3.7 Length of current or most recent job tenure**

	Working or on sick leave* %	Not working* %	General Population+ %
Less than 6 months	29	26	10
6 months but less than 1 year	4	13	10
1 year but less than 2 years	7	11	13
2 years but less than 10 years	28	30	37
10 or more years	30	18	29
Don't know/can't remember	2	2	-
Total	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>647</i>	<i>1,116</i>	

\* Prior to their recent claim for IB. + Source: Labour Force Survey 2002.

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents who had ever worked.

### 3.6 Reasons why last job ended

People who were neither working nor on sick leave from their job in the week prior to the interview, but who had worked in the past, were asked to give the **main** reasons why their last job had ended. In total, recent claimants mentioned thirty main reasons why their most recent job came to an end. Table 3.8 shows the ten most commonly cited reasons.

By far the most frequently cited main reason was that they 'gave up work because of own ill-health or disability' (40 per cent).<sup>9</sup> Recent claimants who did not spontaneously mention this reason were asked if their health condition or disability played a part in their job coming to an end. In total, 62 per cent of recent claimants who were not in work or on sick leave from their job reported – either spontaneously or when prompted – that their ill-health or disability had been a factor in their most recent job coming to an end.

<sup>9</sup> Health reasons for the loss of the most recent job are explored further in Chapter 4 (Section 4.7).

**Table 3.8 Main reasons why the most recent job came to an end**

	%
Gave up work because of own ill-health or disability	40
Made redundant/laid off	15
Temporary/seasonal work came to an end	9
Gave up work because of ill-health or disability of others	6
Resigned/decided to leave	5
Dismissed	5
Became pregnant	4
Fixed term contract came to an end	4
Gave up work for other family or personal reasons	4
The company went out of business	3
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,116</i>

Row percentages. Respondents could give more than one reason. Only the ten most commonly mentioned reasons are shown in the table.

Base: respondents who were not in work or off sick from their job in the week prior to interview.

The other nine most commonly mentioned reasons included: 'made redundant/laid off' (15 per cent); 'temporary/seasonal work came to an end' (nine per cent); 'gave up work because of ill-health or disability of others' (six per cent); 'resigned/decided to leave' (five per cent); 'dismissed' (five per cent); 'became pregnant' (four per cent); 'fixed term contract came to an end' (four per cent); 'gave up work for other family or personal reasons' (four per cent); and the 'company went out of business' (three per cent).

Men and women were equally likely to spontaneously report that their most recent job came to an end because of their health or disability, as were people who described themselves as being white and those from other ethnic backgrounds. The proportions of respondents whose job ended for this reason rose with age (from 27 per cent of 16-24 year olds, to 47 per cent of people in the 55 and above age group).

Recent claimants in areas of high unemployment (34 per cent) were significantly less likely than people in medium (45 per cent) or low unemployment (42 per cent) areas to spontaneously report that their most recent job came to an end because of their health condition or disability. People whose most recent job was temporary (32 per cent) were less likely than where it was permanent (49 per cent) to report that it ended because on their health.

People who had been working, off sick from work or permanently off work due to sickness or disability immediately prior to claiming IB, more often stated that their last job had ended because of their ill-health or disability (58 per cent, 42 per cent and 47 per cent respectively) than did people who had been temporarily sick with no job to return to (27 per cent), unemployed and looking for work (16 per cent) or looking after children or the home (23 per cent) prior to their claim.



3.7 Type of work

Compared with the general population, recent IB claimants were disproportionately drawn from unskilled manual and service occupations (28 per cent). One in six (18 per cent) had worked in skilled trades. Only eight per cent of respondents had been in managerial or professional jobs (Table 3.9). This stands in stark contrast to the proportions in these occupations found in the general population. For example, managers and senior officials are the largest occupational group in the UK at 15 per cent, followed by professionals (13 per cent) and associate professionals (14 per cent). Conversely, only eight per cent of the general population in the UK are employed in skilled trades, and 12 per cent are employed in elementary occupations (Social Trends 2007<sup>10</sup>). In other words, recent IB claimants are over-represented in the less skilled end of the labour market.

**Table 3.9 Type of work done in current/last job**

	%
Manager or senior official	3
Professional	5
Associate professional	3
Administrative and secretarial	9
Skilled trades	18
Personal services	6
Retail and customer services	11
Process/plant operator	10
Unskilled manual and service occupations	28
Other	6
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,456</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents who had worked or were working.

As with the general population, recent female IB claimants were more likely than males to have been employed in administrative and secretarial work (17 per cent compared with four per cent) and the personal services such as hairdressing and social care (13 per cent compared with two per cent). Conversely, male claimants dominated skilled trade occupations (27 per cent of men compared with two per cent of women).

Respondents who were owner occupiers were more likely to have been employed in management positions (five per cent) than people in the private rented (three per cent) and social rented (one per cent) sectors; more likely to have been employed in professional positions (eight per cent) than were recent IB claimants

<sup>10</sup> Labour Force Survey, spring 2003 in Social Trends 2007.

in the private (three per cent) and the social (one per cent) sectors; and more likely to have been in skilled trades (22 per cent) than respondents in the private (14 per cent) or social (15 per cent) rented sectors. Claimants in the owner occupied sector were less likely to have been employed in unskilled manual and service occupations (17 per cent) than were those in the private (34 per cent) and the social (40 per cent) rented sectors (Table 3.10).

**Table 3.10 Type of work done in current/last job, by housing tenure**

	Owner occupied %	Social rented %	Private rented %
Manager or senior official	5	1	3
Professional	8	1	3
Associate professional	4	2	6
Administrative and secretarial	13	6	7
Skilled trades	21	15	14
Personal services	6	6	10
Retail and customer service	10	13	10
Process/plant operator	10	10	11
Unskilled manual and service occupations	17	40	34
Other	5	7	4
Total	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	686	504	200

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents who had worked/were working.

Recent IB claimants who had been in work immediately prior to claiming were more likely to have been working in a skilled trade (28 per cent) than people who had not been in work prior to their claim (14 per cent).

### 3.8 Occupational sector

Incapacity Benefit claimants who had worked, but who were not self-employed in their current or most recent job, were asked questions about their employer. Table 3.11 shows that the majority of them had worked for the private sector (73 per cent), whilst 23 per cent had worked for the public sector. Among the general population of working age people, 79 per cent work in the private sector and 20 in the public sector (*Labour Market Trends*, December 2006).

Table 3.11 Occupational sector

	%
Private firm	73
Public sector organisation	23
Voluntary or charitable organisation	2
Other	1
Don't know	2
Total	100
Base	1,225

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: respondents who had ever worked but were not self-employed in their current/most recent job.

Men were more likely than women to have worked for a private sector employer in their current or most recent job (80 per cent compared with 63 per cent). Women were therefore more likely than men to have worked in the public sector (32 per cent compared with 16 per cent).

Owner occupiers were also more likely to work for the public sector (28 per cent) than were people living in the private rented sector (21 per cent) or social housing (18 per cent). Conversely, they were less likely to work for private employers (69 per cent) than people in the private rented sector (75 per cent) or social housing (76 per cent) (Table 3.12).

Table 3.12 Occupational sector, by housing tenure

	Owner occupied %	Social rented %	Private rented %
Private	69	76	75
Public	28	18	21
Other or don't know	3	6	4
Total	100	100	100
Base	558	446	169

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: respondents who had ever worked but were not self-employed in their current/most recent job.

People who worked for a private sector employer were less likely to be an owner occupier than those who worked in the public sector (46 per cent compared with 57 per cent) and more likely to be a social housing tenant (40 per cent compared with 30 per cent). The figures for private renting were not very different (15 per

cent of people working for private employers and 13 per cent of those working in the public sector).

### 3.9 Size of employer

Table 3.13 shows that about a third (35 per cent) of recent claimants said they had been, or were, employed in large firms with over 500 employees. That compares with over half (56 per cent) of employees in the UK economy as a whole. Two-fifths (40 per cent) of recent IB claimants were employed by firms with less than 50 employees, a figure that is similar to that for the wider economy.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 3.13 Size of employer**

	Recent claimants %	UK employees %
Less than 5	8	7
5-9	8	6
10-19	11	6
20-49	13	7
50-99	7	5
100-249	12	7
250-499	6	5
500 or more	35	56
Totals	100	100
Base	1,225	

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: respondents who had ever worked but were not self-employed in their current/most recent job (excluding people who did not know the size of their firm).

Older recent claimants were more likely than younger ones to work for large employers. For instance, almost half of respondents aged 45 and over worked for employers with 250 or more staff, but only three out of ten people aged under 35 years did so. Thus, 28 per cent of people aged under 25, 32 per cent aged from 25 to 34, 41 per cent aged 35 to 44, 47 per cent aged 45 to 54 and 48 per cent aged 55 or over, worked for firms with 250 or more employees.

As Table 3.14 shows, the proportion of recent claimants who were off sick from work immediately prior to their claim increased with firm size, rising from 27 per

<sup>11</sup> The recent claimant data are self-reported estimates for firm size, which may not be as accurate as the Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) Statistics. Moreover, the former exclude those (n = 106) who did not know how many people worked for their firm; they are more likely to have worked for larger than for smaller firms.

cent of people who worked for firms with 1-9 staff, to 54 per cent of those who had worked for firms with 250 or more employees. In total, just over half (53 per cent) of people who were on sick leave from their job immediately prior to the recent claim, worked for firms that had 250 or more staff.

**Table 3.14    Employment status prior to claim for Incapacity Benefit, by size of employer**

	Number of employees			
	1 to 9	10 to 49	50 to 249	250+
In employment or self-employment	29	30	21	17
Off sick from work	27	32	39	54
Permanently off work due to sickness or disability	11	7	4	7
Unemployed and looking for work	22	20	23	16
Other	12	12	13	6
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>181</i>	<i>270</i>	<i>209</i>	<i>459</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: respondents who had ever worked but were not self-employed in their current/most recent job (excluding people who did not know their firm size).

3.10      Union membership

Table 3.15 shows that the great majority of recent IB claimants (77 per cent) were not members of a trades union. About a fifth (22 per cent) of employees were trades union members in their current or most recent job. This compares with almost three-tenths (28 per cent) of the general population of employees (Labour Force Survey 2006). Thus, recent claimants are a little less likely to be members of trades unions than the working population as a whole.

**Table 3.15    Union membership amongst recent Incapacity Benefit claimants**

	%
Yes	22
No	77
Don't know/can't remember	1
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,225</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents who had worked or were working.

Recent claimants who had been off sick from their job (34 per cent) immediately prior to their claim were by far the people most likely to have been a member of a trades union. Among people who had been working prior to their claim, one in six (18 per cent) was a member of a trades union (Table 3.16).

**Table 3.16 Union membership by employment situation prior to their claim**

<b>Member of a trades union?</b>	<b>In work or self-employment %</b>	<b>Off sick from work %</b>	<b>Temporarily sick or injured with no job %</b>	<b>Permanently off work due to sickness or disability %</b>	<b>Unemployed and looking for work %</b>	<b>Other %</b>
Yes	18	34	16	15	10	10
No	82	66	84	85	90	90
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>282</i>	<i>498</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>231</i>	<i>67</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents who had worked/were working.

The proportion of respondents who were members of a trades union increased by size of firm, rising from only three per cent among people working in firms with less than ten employees to 46 per cent among those in firms with 1,000 or more employees. Recent claimants working in the public sector were most likely to have been a member of a trades union (46 per cent) than people working in the private sector (16 per cent) or in 'other' sectors (nine per cent). Respondents who had a permanent contract in their current or most recent job were more likely to have been a member of a trades union (27 per cent) than people in temporary jobs (seven per cent).

### 3.11 Hours of work

Table 3.17 shows that the majority (76 per cent) of recent IB claimants worked full-time in their current or most recent job, defined here as being more than 30 hours per week. Almost half worked for 40 or more hours. The distribution of working hours for recent claimants is broadly the same as for the general population of working age people (Labour Force Survey 2007).

Table 3.17 Hours worked

	%
1-15	6
16-29	18
30-39	30
40+	46
Total	100
Base	1,433

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents who had been in work in the previous two years.

Female respondents were much more likely than males to work under 40 hours per week. Only 11 per cent of men compared with 45 per cent of women worked under 30 hours per week in their current or most recent job. Conversely, men were much more likely to work full-time (89 per cent). Three-fifths of men compared with only one-fifth of women worked for 40 or more hours per week (Table 3.18).

Table 3.18 Hours worked by gender

	Female %	Male %
1-15	12	2
16-29	33	9
30-39	35	26
40+	20	63
Total	100	100
Base	567	866

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents who had been in work in the previous two years.

Recent claimants who had worked in the private sector were the most likely to have worked for over 40 hours (49 per cent); while those in the public sector were the least likely to have worked that many hours (23 per cent).

3.12 Earnings

Table 3.19 shows that recent IB claimants had relatively low earnings before their transition onto IB. Fifteen per cent had been earning less than £5,000 in their most recent job in the past two years. In total, almost half (47 per cent) had been

earning less than £10,000. Only three per cent had earnings that were around the national average wage (£25,000 – £29,000).<sup>12</sup>

**Table 3.19 Annual earnings**

	%
Less than £5,000	15
£5,000 to £9,999	32
£10,000 to £14,999	28
£15,000 to £19,999	12
£20,000 to £24,999	6
£25,000 to £29,999	3
£30,000 and above	4
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,302</i>

\* Excluding 115 respondents who did not know and 39 who refused to say.

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents who had been in work in the previous two years.

Female IB claimants were disproportionately represented in lower salary bands, a finding that is consistent with the 'gender pay gap' and the propensity of women to work fewer hours than men. Thus, around two-thirds (67 per cent) of women and a third (34 per cent) of men earned less than £10,000 per year. Only four per cent of women, compared with 18 per cent of men, earned £20,000 or more in their most recent job in the two years before their recent claim for IB.

Forty-seven per cent of people who described their ethnic origin as white earned less than £10,000 in their most recent job prior to their claim for IB. This compares with 59 per cent of people from other ethnic backgrounds. Meanwhile, lone parents were the most likely household type to earn under £10,000 (73 per cent). Couples without children living with them and couples with children were the most likely to be earning £15,000 and over.

Table 3.20 shows that recent IB claimants who were owner occupiers (40 per cent) were less likely than people living in private (51 per cent) and social (55 per cent) rented accommodation to earn under £10,000. They were also more likely to earn £15,000 and above per year.

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that these figures are for actual earnings and are not adjusted for working hours. Earnings may be low because rates of pay are low and/or because hours of work are low. Hourly earnings are reported later in this section.



Table 3.20 Annual earnings, by housing tenure

	Owner occupied %	Social rented %	Private rented %
Less than £5,000	11	21	15
£5,000 to £9,999	29	35	36
£10,000 to £14,999	29	28	28
£15,000 to £19,999	14	10	12
£20,000 and above	17	8	9
Total	100	100	100
Base	609	461	178

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents who had been in work in the previous two years.

Claimants living in areas of high unemployment (53 per cent) were more likely to earn less than £10,000 per year than people who lived in medium (46 per cent) and low (38 per cent) unemployment areas.

Table 3.21 shows that recent claimants who had permanent employment (45 per cent) were less likely to have earned under £10,000 per year than people whose current or most recent job was temporary (57 per cent). Respondents with permanent jobs were more likely than those with temporary posts to earn £15,000 or more.

Table 3.21 Annual earnings, by employment tenure

	Permanent job %	Temporary job %
Less than £5,000	14	18
£5,000 to £9,999	31	39
£10,000 to £14,999	29	26
£15,000 to £19,999	13	8
£20,000 and above	13	9
Total	100	100
Base	1,046	251

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents who had been in work in the previous two years.

The amount that people earn is of course affected by the number of hours that they work; and as Tables 3.17 and 3.18 showed, weekly hours varied between respondents. Estimated hourly earnings were calculated by dividing usual weekly earnings by the number of hours that people usually worked each week in their

most recent job in the two years prior to their recent claim for IB. The mean hourly wage was £6.69, though there was considerable variation around this average. Men earned more per hour than women (£7.20 compared with £5.94) and white respondents earned more than people from other ethnic backgrounds (£6.77 compared with £5.70).

### 3.13 Permanent versus temporary employment

Seventy-nine per cent of recent IB claimants had a permanent employment contract and 21 per cent had a temporary contract of one sort or another in their current or most recent job (Table 3.22). Women (83 per cent) were more likely than men (78 per cent) to have a permanent job. The proportion of recent claimants with a permanent contract increased with age, rising from 59 per cent among people under 25 years to 89 per cent among those aged over 54.

**Table 3.22 Employment contract**

Type of contract	%
Permanent contract	79
Seasonal, temporary or casual work	13
Fixed term contract	6
Some other type of non-permanent job	2
Don't know	1
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,456</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents who had been in work in the previous two years.

Respondents who were owner occupiers were more likely to have been in permanent posts (85 per cent) than people in either social housing (76 per cent) or private renting (72 per cent).

Recent claimants who had been in work (84 per cent) or off sick from their job (86 per cent) immediately prior to their claim were more likely to have had a permanent rather than a temporary contract than respondents who had been permanently off work due to sickness or disability (66 per cent) or unemployed and looking for work (66 per cent).

Recent IB claimants who had worked for firms employing over 1,000 people were the most likely to have had permanent tenure (86 per cent). The people who were the least likely to have had permanent tenure had worked for firms with less than ten employees (76 per cent). The proportion with permanent contracts was about the same for people who worked for private firms (80 per cent) as for those working in the public sector (81 per cent).

3.14 Work history

Table 3.23 shows that 70 per cent of recent claimants had spent most of their working lives in steady jobs or in self-employment. The remainder had a more or less chequered employment history for one reason or another.

Table 3.23 Work history

	%
I have spent most of my working life in steady jobs	64
I have spent most of my working life self-employed	6
I have been in and out of work several times	13
I have mainly done casual or short-term work	4
I have spent more time unemployed than in work	4
I have spent a lot of time out of work because of sickness or injury	3
I have spent a lot of my adult life looking after family or the home	6
None of these apply to me	1
Total	100
Base	1,456

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents who had worked.

There were gender differences in recent claimants’ overall work situation. Sixty-seven per cent of male claimants had spent most of their working lives in steady jobs whilst 60 per cent of female claimants said that they had done so. Conversely, female claimants (15 per cent) had more often spent a lot of their adult life looking after their family than males (one per cent).

Respondents who were owner occupiers (79 per cent) were much more likely to have spent most of their working lives in steady jobs than had people in the private rented sector (58 per cent) or social housing (51 per cent). They were also more likely to have been self-employed (eight per cent) than claimants in the private (five per cent) and social rented (four per cent) sectors. Respondents in the private rented sector (21 per cent) or social housing (19 per cent) were much more likely than owner occupiers (five per cent) to state that they had been in and out of work several times (Table 3.24).

**Table 3.24 Work history by housing tenure**

	Owner occupied %	Social rented %	Private rented %
I have spent most of my working life in steady jobs	78	51	58
I have spent most of my working life self-employed	8	4	5
I have been in and out of work several times	5	19	21
I have mainly done casual or short-term work	2	5	7
I have spent more time unemployed than in work	2	6	4
I have spent a lot of time out of work because of sickness or injury	1	4	2
I have spent a lot of my adult life looking after family or the home	4	10	5
Total	100	100	100
Total	681	498	198

\* Excluding 15 respondents who said 'None of these apply to me'.

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents who had worked.

There was an association between unemployment levels and work history. Recent claimants in areas of high unemployment were less likely to have spent most of their working lives in steady jobs (61 per cent) than people in low (67 per cent) and medium (67 per cent) unemployment areas. Respondents in areas of high unemployment were also more likely to have been in and out of work several times (17 per cent) than respondents in medium (11 per cent) and low (nine per cent) unemployment areas.

Claimants who were working or on sick leave from their job immediately prior to claiming IB, were more likely to have spent most of their working life in steady jobs or self-employment than people who were not in work prior to their claim (78 per cent compared with 55 per cent). Respondents who were not in work immediately prior to claiming IB were more likely to have had chequered employment histories (Table 3.25). These results are very similar to those for work status in the week prior to the interview.

**Table 3.25 Work history, by working status prior to claiming Incapacity Benefit\***

	In work or on sick leave prior to claim %	Not in work or on sick leave prior to claim %
I have spent most of my working life in steady jobs	70	53
I have spent most of my working life self-employed	8	2
I have been in and out of work several times	9	20
I have mainly done casual or short-term work	3	7
I have spent more time unemployed than in work	2	8
I have spent a lot of time out of work because of sickness or injury	2	3
I have spent a lot of my adult life looking after family or the home	6	8
Total	100	100
<i>Base</i>	974	466

\* Excluding 15 respondents who said ‘None of these apply to me’.  
Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents who had worked.

Claimants whose recent claim was their first ever claim for IB were more likely to have spent most of their working lives in steady jobs (68 per cent) than people who had claimed on a previous occasion (58 per cent). Respondents who had claimed previously were more likely to have been in and out of work several times (18 per cent) than claimants who were making their first ever claim (11 per cent).

Recent claimants in permanent employment positions were more likely to have spent most of their working lives in steady jobs (71 per cent) than people in temporary jobs (42 per cent). Claimants in temporary employment were more likely to have been in and out of work several times (24 per cent) than people in permanent jobs (ten per cent); more likely to have mainly done casual or short term work than people in permanent employment (14 per cent compared with one per cent); and more likely to have spent more time unemployed than in work (eight per cent compared with three per cent).

People in receipt of IB at the time of the interview were more likely to have spent most of their working lives in steady jobs (73 per cent) than people who were not in receipt of IB (56 per cent). Claimants not in receipt of IB at the time of interview were more likely to have been in and out of work several times (16 per cent) than had people in receipt of IB (ten per cent); and more likely to have spent more time unemployed than in work (six per cent) than people in receipt of IB at the time of interview (one per cent).

## 4 Health and disability

This chapter examines health and disability among recent claimants of Incapacity Benefit (IB).

### 4.1 Summary

- Ninety-six per cent of recent claimants of IB said either that they currently or in the previous 12 months had at least one health condition or disability.
- The most commonly reported health problems or disabilities were depression, stress and anxiety, or musculo-skeletal conditions. The conditions reported by men and women were broadly similar, except that more women reported having depression or stress and anxiety, while more men said they had heart problems or high blood pressure.
- Men were more likely than women to say that the major cause of their main health condition or disability was related to their work or the result of a household, leisure or sports accident or injury. Women were more likely than men to report that their condition was a non-work-related disease or illness.
- Among health conditions and disabilities that were not present at birth, 58 per cent developed gradually over time and 42 per cent began suddenly.
- Among people who were in paid work or on sick leave immediately prior to their claim for IB, 78 per cent of health conditions or disabilities affected their ability to do their job.
- Among people who were **not** in paid work or on sick leave in the week before their survey interview, but who had worked in the past, 62 per cent reported that their health condition or disability had played a role in their most recent job coming to an end.

### 4.2 Existence of health conditions or disabilities

Almost all respondents either currently (84 per cent), or in the previous 12 months (12 per cent), had a health condition or disability that affected their everyday

activities. The remaining four per cent had neither a health condition nor a disability in the past year.

The number of people who said they did not have a health condition or disability that affected their everyday activities was too small (n = 66) to examine in detail. However, at the time of the interview, 23 per cent were receiving IB, three per cent were waiting for their claim to be processed, 35 per cent said their claim had been rejected and 39 per cent reported that they were no longer claiming this benefit. Compared with people who did have health conditions or disabilities, they were much more likely to have had their claim rejected or to be otherwise no longer in receipt of IB by the time of their interview for this study.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the 96 per cent of recent claimants who said they currently, or in the past 12 months, had a health condition or disability that affected their everyday activities.

4.3      Type of health condition or disability

Respondents who said they had a health problem or disability were asked about the nature of that condition. The latter was elicited by showing them a card with a list of possible types of condition and asking them to say which of the things on it applied to them **at the time of their recent claim**. Respondents could list more than one type of condition.

As Table 4.1 shows, new claimants of IB were experiencing a wide range of conditions. The most commonly reported conditions were depression (which was mentioned by 34 per cent of respondents with a health condition or disability); stress or anxiety (30 per cent); problems with their legs or feet (29 per cent); problems with their neck, shoulders or back (27 per cent); and problems with their arms or hands. In summary, the most common health problems or disabilities were mental health or musculo-skeletal in nature.

The prevalence of particular types of health condition or disability was broadly similar between men and women. However, significantly more women than men reported suffering from stress, anxiety or depression, but not from other mental health conditions. Significantly, more men than women reported having heart problems or high blood pressure (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1 Health condition or disability by gender**

	Women %	Men %	All %
Stress or anxiety	36	25	30
Depression	43	28	34
Other mental health conditions	12	10	11
Problems with arms or hands	21	17	19
Problems with legs or feet	27	30	29
Problems with neck, shoulders or back	28	26	27
Difficulty in seeing or hearing	7	8	7
Skin conditions or allergies	4	4	4
Chest or breathing problems	11	12	12
Heart problems or blood pressure	9	14	12
Problems with stomach, liver, kidney or digestion	11	11	11
Diabetes	4	5	5
Problems due to alcohol or illegal use of drugs	3	8	6
Epilepsy	2	1	2
Learning difficulties	2	3	2
Progressive illness not covered above	5	4	4
Other health problem or disability	20	13	16
<i>Base</i>	<i>716</i>	<i>1,060</i>	<i>1,775</i>

Column percentages. Respondents could cite more than one health condition or disability.  
 Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability currently or in the past 12 months.

There was some variation in the prevalence of particular health conditions or disabilities by age group. A higher proportion of middle-aged respondents (aged from 25 to 44 years) reported having stress, anxiety or depression at the time of their recent claim than was the case among younger or older people. The prevalence of musculo-skeletal problems was higher among older, rather than among younger, respondents. Likewise, older people were more likely than younger respondents to say they had chest or breathing problems and heart problems or high blood pressure. The prevalence of diabetes and 'other progressive illnesses' was also higher among older, rather than younger, people.

Respondents were also asked to say what was their **main** health condition or disability, 'that is, the one that most affects your everyday activities.' Table 4.2 groups these main health conditions and disabilities into a six-fold categorisation used in **social surveys** by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This classification is different from the classification of health diagnoses used for **administrative purposes** by the DWP, which is based on forms completed by General Practitioners (GPs) on behalf of claimants. The figures in Table 4.2 relate to the respondents' own perception of what is their main condition, not that of their GPs. Thus, the data in the table are not directly comparable with DWP's administrative data on health conditions.



In summary, three out of five recent claimants of IB reported that their main health condition or disability at the time of their claim was musculo-skeletal, a quarter that it was mental health and a fifth that it was chronic or systemic (Table 4.2). Chronic and systemic conditions include heart problems or blood pressure; problems with stomach, liver or digestion; chest or breathing problems; diabetes; skin conditions; epilepsy and progressive illnesses not covered elsewhere.

**Table 4.2    Main category of health problem or disability**

Category	%
Mental health	26
Musculo-skeletal	38
Chronic or systemic	20
Sensory disabilities	1
Learning disability	1
Other	13
Don't know	2
Total	100
Base	1,775

Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability currently or in the past 12 months.

As described in Chapter 6 (Section 6.8), respondents were asked whether they were receiving IB at the time of the interview. One in five (20 per cent) said they were not receiving IB because their claim had been rejected. There were no significant differences in main category of health problem or disability between people who said their claim had been rejected and those who did not say their claim had been rejected.

Women were more likely than men to report that their main health condition or disability at the time of their recent claim for IB was to do with their mental health (especially stress, anxiety and depression). Indeed, a third of women compared with only a fifth of men said it was mental health. Meanwhile, men were more likely than women to say their main health problem was musculo-skeletal (Table 4.3).

The age distribution of respondents' main health problem or disability was not exactly the same as for all of their conditions, reported above. The prevalence of mental health problems was highest among respondents aged 16 to 24 (35 per cent) and those aged 25 to 44 (40 per cent), after which it dropped with each successive age group. Musculo-skeletal problems and chronic or systemic conditions broadly increased by age group (Table 4.3).

People who said their ethnic background was white were much more likely than those from other ethnic backgrounds to report that their main condition was

mental ill-health (Table 4.3). However, it is important to note that the 'Other' category includes a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, including Asian or Asian British, black or black British, Chinese, mixed and other ethnic groups as well as those who said they did not know or who refused to answer the question. There were differences in the prevalence of mental health conditions between people of Asian and black ethnic origin, but the number of respondents was too small to draw definitive conclusions.

**Table 4.3 Main category of health problem or disability by personal characteristics**

Category	Mental health %	Musculo-skeletal %	Chronic or systemic %	Other %	Base %
<b>Gender</b>					
Men	22	42	21	14	1,042
Women	33	33	18	15	697
<b>Age group</b>					
16 to 24	35	35	14	16	232
25 to 34	40	32	12	16	261
35 to 44	30	40	17	13	370
45 to 54	23	39	24	14	459
55+	15	43	28	14	411
<b>Ethnicity</b>					
White	27	39	19	15	1,590
Other	19	40	28	14	149

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability currently or in the past 12 months.

People who had **not** been in work immediately prior to their claim were more likely than those that had been in work to say that their main condition was a mental health one (28 per cent compared with 22 per cent). The prevalence of mental ill-health was especially high for people who had been looking after children or the home or care-giving immediately prior to their claim (50 per cent).

Meanwhile, people who had been in work were more likely than those who were not, to report that their main condition was musculo-skeletal. Among respondents who had had a job within the previous two years, a higher proportion of people whose job was temporary rather than permanent reported that their main condition was to do with their mental health (Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4    Main category of health problem or disability by work status**

Category	Mental health %	Musculo-skeletal %	Chronic or systemic %	Other %	Base
In work prior to claim?					
In work	22	47	19	12	401
Not in work	28	36	20	16	1,337
Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability currently or in the past 12 months					
Worked in last 2 years?					
Worked	25	41	20	14	1,330
Not worked	31	30	22	18	399
Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability currently or in the past 12 months					
Most recent job					
Permanent	24	42	21	13	1,105
Temporary	31	37	14	18	271
Base: all respondents with a health condition who had a job in the previous two years					

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Respondents were asked if they had a health condition that comes and goes or one that remained stable over time. Half of all new IB claimants reported that they had a condition that fluctuated (49 per cent) and a similar proportion that it was constant over time (50 per cent); the remainder (two per cent) said that they were not sure or did not know if they had a condition that fluctuated or was constant.

Women were more likely than men to report that they had a health condition that fluctuated over time (54 per cent compared with 46 per cent) and less likely to say that it remained constant (46 per cent compared with 54 per cent). People aged between 25 and 44 were more likely than younger or older people to report that they had a fluctuating condition.

New IB claimants whose main health problem or disability was mental ill-health were much more likely to have a fluctuating condition than people with a physical condition. Thus two-thirds (66 per cent) of people whose main problem was their mental health reported that they had a fluctuating condition. That compares with about two-fifths (44 per cent) of those with a physical health condition or disability. To put it the other way around, people with a condition that fluctuated over time were about twice as likely as those who said it was constant to report that their main condition or disability was their mental health. Thus, 36 per cent of respondents with a fluctuating condition, compared to 18 per cent with a constant condition, said mental ill-health affected their everyday activities the most.

As noted above, around a quarter (26 per cent) of recent claimants said that their **main** health problem concerned their mental health. However, only a small minority (eight per cent) reported that they **only** had a mental health condition. It was much more common for them to say that they had physical **and** mental health problems. A third of all new claimants had both physical and mental health problems, divided equally between those who described mental health as their main condition and those who said it was not their main condition (Table 4.5). Among claimants for whom some form of mental ill-health was their **main** condition, about half reported that it was depression and another third that it was stress or anxiety.

**Table 4.5 Prevalence of mental health conditions**

Type of condition	%
Mental health sole condition	8
Mental health main condition	18
Mental health not main condition	18
Physical health condition(s) only	56
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,776</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability currently or in the past 12 months.

The combination of mental health and physical conditions was especially prevalent among respondents who, immediately prior to their recent claim, were looking after the home or caring for children or a sick, frail or disabled person. It was least common among people who reported that they were in work, temporarily sick but had no job, or were unemployed and looking for work, prior to their claim. Among people who were neither in work nor off sick from their job at the time of the interview, the prevalence of having both mental health and physical conditions did not significantly vary by length of time since they were last in paid work.

#### 4.4 Cause and onset of condition

Respondents were asked what they considered to be the major cause of their main health problem or disability. Presented with a card showing six broad types of cause, almost half (49 per cent) of new IB claimants said that it was a non-work-related disease or illness. About one in ten respondents said that it was a work-related disease or illness (11 per cent), while a similar proportion (ten per cent) reported that it was work-related accident or injury (the latter included work-related traffic accidents). Less than one in ten respondents reported that it was a household, leisure or sports-related accident or injury (eight per cent) and a similar proportion said they had been born with their main condition or that it had occurred at birth (eight per cent). Another six per cent had acquired their main

health problem or disability as a result of a non-work-related road traffic accident. Finally, eight per cent of respondents said they did not know what had caused it (Table 4.6).

As Table 4.6 shows, men were more likely than women to report that their main health condition or disability was related to their work. They were also more likely to say it was the result of a household, leisure or sports-related accident or injury. Meanwhile, women more often said that their main health problem or disability was due to a non-work-related disease or illness.

**Table 4.6 Self-reported major cause of main health condition or disability**

	Women %	Men %	All %
Born with it*	8	9	8
Traffic accident or injury+	5	6	6
Household, leisure or sports-related accident or injury	5	10	8
Work-related accident or injury^	7	13	10
Work-related diseases and illnesses	9	12	11
Non-work-related diseases and illnesses	57	44	49
Don't know	9	7	8
Total	100	100	100
Base	716	1,060	1,776

\* Including birth injuries and hereditary illnesses.  
+ Not work-related.  
^ Including work-related traffic accidents.  
Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability currently or in the past 12 months.

Respondents' perception of the major cause of their main health problem or disability varied according to age group. The prevalence of three main types of self-reported cause **decreased** with age group. These were conditions that:

- people were born with or acquired at a birth;
- were caused by road traffic accidents;
- were caused by household, leisure or sports-related accident or injury.

In contrast, the prevalence of work-related diseases and illnesses **increased** with age group. Meanwhile, non-work-related diseases and illnesses remained broadly constant across age groups (Table 4.7).

The self-perceived major cause of respondents' main health problem or disability also varied by the type condition they had. Six out of ten respondents whose main condition was mental, chronic or systemic, or 'other' said that its major cause was

a non-work-related disease or illness. In contrast, that cause was reported by only three out of ten people with a musculo-skeletal condition. Recent IB claimants whose main condition was musculo-skeletal were much more likely than other people to say that the major cause was an accident or injury. Respondents with chronic, systemic or 'other' conditions were more likely than those with mental health or musculo-skeletal problems to report that they were born with it or acquired it at birth (Table 4.8).

**Table 4.7 Self-perceived major cause of main health condition or disability by age group**

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Born with it*	13	11	7	8	6
Traffic accident or injury+	12	8	6	4	3
Household, leisure or sports accident or injury	12	7	9	8	5
Work-related accident or injury^	5	9	13	10	13
Work-related diseases and illnesses	2	5	8	13	19
Non-work-related diseases and illnesses	51	50	49	50	47
Don't know	6	11	9	8	7
Total	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	235	268	379	468	419

\* Including birth injuries and hereditary illnesses.

+ Not work-related.

^ Including work-related traffic accidents.

Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability currently or in the past 12 months.

**Table 4.8 Self-perceived major cause of their main health problem or disability, by main type of health problem or disability**

	Mental health %	Musculo-skeletal %	Chronic or systemic %	Other %
Born with it*	6	6	16	11
Traffic accident or injury+	2	10	2	5
Household, leisure or sports accident or injury	2	17	2	4
Work-related accident or injury^	3	23	2	2
Work-related disease or illness	16	10	10	5
Non-work-related disease or illness	61	29	62	63
Don't know	11	6	7	11
Total	100	100	100	100
Base	235	268	379	468

\* Including birth injuries and hereditary illnesses.  
+ Not work-related.  
^ Including work-related traffic accidents.  
Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability currently or in the past 12 months.

People whose health conditions or disabilities did not begin at birth were asked whether they occurred suddenly or came on over time. In total, 42 per cent of conditions or disabilities occurred suddenly and 58 per cent developed gradually over time.<sup>13</sup> Men were more likely than women to report that their conditions occurred suddenly, a result that at least in part reflects the higher degree of injuries and accidents among the former compared with the latter. Probably for similar reasons, younger respondents (especially those under 25) were more likely than older people to say that their condition had a sudden onset. Finally, about two-thirds of mental health conditions came on gradually over time compared with only half the physical health conditions or disabilities that people were experiencing at the time of their recent claim for IB (Table 4.9).

<sup>13</sup> The percentages in this paragraph and in Table 4.9 – and the number of cases on which they are calculated – refer to respondents’ health conditions or disabilities. Thus the first row in Table 4.9 shows that 45 per cent of the conditions that men had occurred suddenly while 55 per cent came on over time. Respondents with several conditions may have had a condition that occurred suddenly and another that developed gradually.

**Table 4.9** Whether health conditions or disabilities that did not begin at birth occurred suddenly or came on over time

Category	Occurred suddenly %	Came on over time %	Base
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	45	55	2,095
Women	38	62	1,600
<b>Age group</b>			
16 to 24	52	48	353
25 to 34	46	55	504
35 to 44	44	56	827
45 to 54	39	61	1,095
55+	39	61	909
<b>Mental health conditions?</b>			
Yes	36	64	2,232
No	51	49	1,463

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all health conditions and disabilities that did not begin at birth.

## 4.5 Health trajectory

All respondents (whether they had a health condition or not) were asked whether their health was getting better or worse. Overall, about a quarter felt their health was improving, while slightly more than a quarter reported that it was getting worse. About a third of respondents said their health was stable and the remaining sixth that it was changeable over time (Table 4.10).

**Table 4.10** Health trajectory by gender

	Men %	Women %	All %
Getting better	26	20	24
Getting worse	26	28	27
Staying the same	33	30	32
Changeable over time	15	22	18
Total	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>758</i>	<i>1,086</i>	<i>1,844</i>

Base: all respondents. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.



The main gender difference was that men were more likely to say their health was improving and women that it was changeable. Thus, 26 per cent of men compared with 20 per cent of women felt their health was getting better. Meanwhile, 15 per cent of men said their health was changeable over time, but the proportion for women was 22 per cent (Table 4.9). Younger people were more likely to say their health was getting better while older respondents were more likely to say it was getting worse (Table 4.11).

**Table 4.11 Health trajectory by age group**

	16-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55+ %
Getting better	33	31	22	21	17
Getting worse	14	19	27	33	34
Staying the same	40	32	29	27	35
Changeable over time	13	18	22	18	15
Total	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	266	284	390	473	424

Base: all respondents. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

People whose recent claim for IB was their first one were much more likely than those who had claimed before to say that their health was getting better (27 per cent compared with 17 per cent). They were also less likely to report that it was getting worse (24 per cent compared with 33 per cent). Interestingly, people who had claimed IB before were more likely than first-time claimers to feel that their health was changeable over time (23 per cent and 15 per cent respectively). Meanwhile, first-time claimers were a little more likely than repeat claimers to say their health was stable (34 per cent compared with 28 per cent).

Respondents who were in paid employment or self-employed immediately prior to their recent claim for IB were more likely than those who were not in work, to report that their health was improving and less likely to say it was getting worse. Thus, 30 per cent of people who were in work before their claim said that their health was getting better, which compares with only 22 per cent among those who were not in work. And while 22 per cent of people in work prior to their claim reported that their health was getting worse, the figure was 29 per cent for people not in work (Table 4.12).

**Table 4.12 Health trajectory by whether respondents were in work prior to their IB claim or the week prior to the interview**

	Prior to IB claim		Week prior to interview	
	In work %	Not in work %	In work %	Not in work %
Getting better	30	22	44	20
Getting worse	22	29	11	30
Staying the same	31	32	27	33
Changeable over time	18	18	19	17
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	758	1,086	248	1,595

Base: all respondents. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

As one might expect, there was an even bigger difference in health trajectory between people who were in work in the week before their **interview** for this survey and those who were not in work. Respondents who were in work in the week prior to the interview were twice as likely to say their health was getting better as those who were not in work that week (44 per cent compared with 20 per cent respectively). Among people in work in the week prior to the interview, only 11 per cent said their health was deteriorating, but among those who were not in work the figure was 30 per cent (Table 4.12).

Similarly, people who were no longer on IB at the time of their interview for the survey were more likely than those who were still receiving it, to say that their health was improving (29 per cent compared with 18 per cent). Respondents who had left IB were also less likely than people who remained claiming to feel that their health was getting worse (23 per cent compared with 31 per cent).

However, there were significant differences in perceived health trajectory among those who were not receiving IB, depending upon whether their claim was still being processed, or had been rejected, or they were no longer claiming it. Among people who reported that they were no longer claiming IB, 42 per cent said their health was improving and only 12 per cent said it was getting worse. In contrast, among respondents whose claim was still being processed, only 15 per cent said their health was getting better and 35 per cent that it was deteriorating. Among people whose claim for IB was rejected, 22 per cent reported that their health was improving and 29 per cent that it was getting worse.

Perceived health trajectory also varied by whether their health condition or disability included mental ill-health. People who **only** had mental health conditions were much more likely than other respondents to report that their health was improving and very much less likely to say it was getting worse. People with both mental health **and** physical health conditions or disabilities were the least likely to feel that their health was getting better. Meanwhile, respondents who **only** had

physical health conditions or disabilities were the least likely to say their health was changeable over time (Table 4.13).

**Table 4.13 Health trajectory by whether respondents had mental or physical health conditions or disabilities**

	Only mental health conditions %	Mental and physical health conditions %	Only physical health conditions %
Getting better	35	19	25
Getting worse	8	31	29
Staying the same	35	25	33
Changeable over time	23	25	13
Total	100	100	100
Base	142	643	990

Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability currently or in the past 12 months.

### 4.6 Waiting for medical treatment

Approximately two out of five IB recipients were currently on a waiting list for medical treatment of some kind at the time of the survey.<sup>14</sup> There were no significant differences in this respect between men and women. However, there were differences by age group in that people under 25 were significantly less likely than older respondents to be on a waiting list for medical treatment. Thus, about three out of ten young people were on a waiting list compared with about four out of ten respondents aged 25 and above (Table 4.14).

**Table 4.14 Whether respondents were on a waiting list for medical treatment by age**

	16-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55+ %
On a waiting list	28	38	40	43	39
Not on a waiting list	72	62	60	57	61
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Base	265	282	380	466	418

Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents (excluding those who did not know if they were on a waiting list. n=27).

<sup>14</sup> It is not known what kind of medical treatment they were waiting for.

There were no statistically significant differences in whether or not people were on a waiting list for medical treatment between first-time and repeat claimers of IB. Nor were there any significant differences according to whether or not respondents had been in work immediately prior to their recent claim. In each case, about two-fifths were waiting for medical treatment.

However, there were differences between people who were currently in receipt of IB and those who were not. Respondents who were on this benefit when interviewed for the survey were more likely (45 per cent) than those who were not (31 per cent), to be awaiting medical treatment. Moreover, people who said they were no longer claiming IB (23 per cent) were less likely to be on a waiting list than people whose claim was still being processed (38 per cent) or had been rejected (38 per cent). Similarly, people who were not in work in the week prior to interview were about twice as likely as those who were working to be on a waiting list for medical treatment (41 per cent compared with 19 per cent). All of this suggests that medical treatment may be an important factor in the timing of a return to work.

## 4.7 Health and employment

People who were in paid work, or on sick leave, immediately prior to their recent claim for IB, were asked whether each of their health conditions or disabilities affected their ability to do their job. The great majority of respondents thought that their health conditions or disabilities did indeed affect their ability to perform their job.

Altogether, 78 per cent of health conditions or disabilities affected respondents' ability to do their job and 22 per cent did not do so. There was relatively little difference between men and women in this respect. There was also not much difference in these figures between the different age groups. The exception was that, among people aged under 55, eight out of ten experienced conditions that affected their ability to do their job, but for people who were older than that the figure was only seven out of ten (Table 4.15).

**Table 4.15** Age group by whether health conditions affected ability to perform the job people were doing prior to their claim for IB

	Affected ability to do job	Did not affect ability	Total	Base
16 to 24	80	20	100	353
25 to 34	84	16	100	504
35 to 44	82	18	100	827
45 to 54	80	20	100	1,095
55+	71	29	100	909
All	78	21	100	2,173

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all health conditions or disabilities of people who were in paid work or on sick pay prior to their claim for IB.

As Table 4.16 shows, there was relatively little difference between the type of main health condition and whether it affected respondents’ ability to do their job.

**Table 4.16** Main health condition by whether health conditions affected ability to perform the job people were doing prior to their claim for IB

	Affected ability to do job	Did not affect ability	Total	Base
Mental health	83	17	100	552
Musculo-skeletal	76	24	100	837
Chronic or systemic	74	26	100	450
Other	81	19	100	288
All	78	22	100	2,128

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all health conditions or disabilities of people who were in paid work or on sick pay prior to their claim for IB.

People who were not in paid work or on sick leave in the week before their interview but who had been in work in the past, were asked why their last job had ended. If they did not spontaneously report that they gave up the job because of their ill-health or disability, they were then asked whether it had played a part in their most recent job coming to an end.

Altogether, six out of ten (62 per cent) respondents who were not in work or on sick leave immediately prior to their recent claim for IB but who had worked in the past, reported that their health condition or disability was a factor in their most recent job coming to an end. The figures for men and women in this respect were not significantly different: for both genders, about six out of ten had lost their most recent job at least in part because of their health or disability. Nor were there differences between respondents by ethnic background. However, compared to people with other types of main condition, a higher proportion of respondents with chronic or systemic conditions said their health or disability had played a part in their most recent job coming to an end (Table 4.17).<sup>15</sup>

However, there were significant differences across the age groups as to whether health or disability had affected whether respondents' most recent job had come to an end.<sup>16</sup> Respondents who were aged under 25 were much less likely to report that their health or disability played a role in their most recent job coming to an end. Indeed, under half of them reported that this was a factor. At the other extreme, people aged 55 and older were more likely than younger respondents to say their health affected their job termination. Seven out of ten people in this age group reported that their most recent job had come to an end at least in part for health reasons (Table 4.17).

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<sup>15</sup> 'Chronic and systemic conditions' include heart problems or blood pressure; problems with stomach, liver or digestion; chest or breathing problems; diabetes; skin conditions; epilepsy and progressive illnesses not covered elsewhere.

<sup>16</sup> That is, among those respondents who were not in work or on sick leave immediately prior to their claim for IB .

**Table 4.17 Whether health conditions played a part in the most recent job coming to an end**

Category	Played a part	Did not play a part	Total	Base
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	60	40	100	649
Women	64	36	100	466
<b>Age group</b>				
16 to 24	45	55	100	164
25 to 34	61	39	100	197
35 to 44	61	40	100	223
45 to 54	65	35	100	290
55+	70	30	100	238
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	62	38	100	1,020
Other	64	37	100	96
<b>Main condition</b>				
Mental health	58	42	100	310
Musculo-skeletal	63	37	100	377
Chronic or systemic	70	30	100	203
Other	59	41	100	153

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: respondents who were **not** in paid work or on sick pay prior to their claim for IB.

There was no statistically significant difference between people whose claim for IB was their first and those who had claimed it on a previous occasion, as to whether health was a factor in their most recent job coming to an end. However, there was a difference in this respect between people who were not receiving IB at the time of their interview for the survey and those who were getting it. A somewhat higher proportion of people who were receiving IB (65 per cent) said their job had ended, at least in part, because of their health or disability than was the case for people who were not on IB (57 per cent).

Thus, in the great majority of cases, people’s health or disability had affected their ability to perform their job. More often than not, health had played a role in their most recent job coming to an end. The next chapter looks at the response of employers to their health problems.

## 5 The role of employers

### 5.1 Introduction

There is currently a policy emphasis on interventions that might help people who become sick or disabled to remain in the workplace for longer or to avoid a sickness absence altogether. In part, job retention depends on the employer being able and willing to make accommodations, or put in place workplace adaptations and occupational health services. This chapter looks at whether and when recent Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants who had been in work or off sick from work immediately prior to their claim, had discussed their health condition with their employer, occupational health service or other people such as their General Practitioner (GP). It also explores whether and how employers had responded, for example, by making adjustments to their working conditions.

### 5.2 Summary

- Around seven out of ten (69 per cent) of recent claimants who had been in paid work or on sick leave prior to their claim for IB and had a condition that affected their ability to perform their job discussed it with their employer. The most common timing for those who had told their employers was after the job had started, but as soon as the condition had become a problem.
- Two-thirds of those who had discussed their condition with their employer had thought them to have been either very or fairly helpful. A third of employees had perceived their employer to be either fairly or very unhelpful.
- The majority of recent claimants (71 per cent) who had been in paid work or on sick leave before their claim for IB had had no access to occupational health services through their employer.
- By far the majority of claimants (83 per cent) who had been in work or on sick leave prior to their claim for IB and had a condition which affected their ability to do their job, reported that no workplace changes had been made to help accommodate them.



- Of those for whom workplace adaptations had been made, 74 per cent thought that the changes had helped them to remain in work for longer than they otherwise would have been able to.
- Over two-thirds (69 per cent) of recent claimants who had been in paid work or on sick pay immediately prior to their claim for IB said that they had consulted people other than their employer (for example a trades union representative, a GP or friends or relatives) about the effect of their condition on their ability to do their job.

### 5.3 The role of the employer

The timing at which people tell their employer, or whether people tell their employer at all, that they have an illness or condition which requires workplace adaptations or an alternative work role have been found to vary between IB recipients. Factors affecting whether, and at what point, an employee would discuss their condition with an employer, or work-based occupational health person, included their expectation about how their employer might respond (for example, some participants feared being sacked) and whether people wanted others to know about their condition (Sainsbury and Davidson 2006).

People who were employees in paid work or on sick pay immediately prior to their recent claim – described here as ‘employees’ for convenience – and who had at least one health condition that affected their ability to do their job, were asked whether they discussed it with their employer. In total, almost seven out of ten (69 per cent) had discussed their health condition or disability with their employer at some point.

In summary, around three out ten (31 per cent) employees had not discussed the problem with their employer (Table 5.1, col. 1). Meanwhile, just over a quarter (27 per cent) had ‘struggled on’ (Sainsbury and Davidson, 2006) with their condition before discussing it with their employer, either until some time after it had become a problem (14 per cent) or once it had got worse (13 per cent).

**Table 5.1 Whether employees discussed their condition with their employer after it began to affect their ability to do their job and when they did so**

	Had condition that affected job %	Discussed condition with employer %
Did not discuss it with employer	31	-
Before started the job	8	12
After started the job but as soon as it became a problem	35	51
After started job but not until some time after it became a problem	14	21
Not until the condition became worse	13	19
<i>Base</i>	<i>743</i>	<i>528</i>

Row percentages. People could give more than one response.

Base: respondents in paid work or sick pay immediately prior to their IB claim that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job (743) and those who discussed it with their employer (528).

Female employees were significantly more likely than male ones to report that they had discussed their health condition or disability after it had begun to affect their ability to do their job (74 per cent compared with 66 per cent). However, there were no statistically significant differences by age group in whether or not employees had discussed their health condition with their employer.

Whether or not employees discussed their health condition or disability with their employer after it had begun to affect their performance at work, did not vary significantly by whether they had mental health or only physical health problems; nor by whether their job was permanent or temporary; or by how many employees worked for the firm. However, people who worked in the public sector (82 per cent) were significantly more likely than those who worked for private firms (69 per cent) to say they had discussed their condition with their employer.

Among those who **had** discussed it, the most common time at which they did so was after they had started the job, but as soon as the condition had become a problem. This was the case with around half (51 per cent) of employees who had discussed their health or disability with their employer. Meanwhile, 12 per cent discussed it with their employer before they started the job, 21 per cent after they started the job but some time after the condition became a problem, and 19 per cent after they started the job but not until the problem had got worse (Table 5.1, col. 2).

The proportion of employees whose condition had affected their performance at work and who had told their employer before starting the job, decreased with age, falling from 21 per cent among people aged under 25 to seven per cent among those aged over 54 years. The likelihood of discussing it with their employer either

some time after they had started the job, or when the condition had got worse, increased with age (Table 5.2).

The timing of discussions with their employer was broadly the same as between people who were working immediately prior to their recent claim and those who were on sick leave from their job. However, one difference was that people working (18 per cent) were twice as likely as people who were off sick from their job (nine per cent) to report that they had discussed their condition before starting the job.

**Table 5.2    When employees discussed their condition with their employer after it began to affect their ability to do the job, by age**

	16-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55+ %
Before started the job	21	16	16	10	7
After started the job but as soon as it became a problem	61	52	49	57	45
After started job but not until some time after it became a problem	11	24	21	19	23
Not until the condition became worse	13	13	16	18	27
<i>Base</i>	<i>[35]</i>	<i>76</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>159</i>	<i>138</i>

Respondents could give more than one answer.  
Base: all respondents in paid work or sick pay prior to their IB claim that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job and who had discussed it with their employer.

People whose current or most recent job was temporary (27 per cent) were much **more** likely than those with permanent contracts (ten per cent) to have discussed their health condition with the employer before starting their job. But they were **less** likely than people with permanent posts to say they discussed it some time after the job had commenced (16 per cent compared with 21 per cent) and not until the condition had become worse (nine per cent compared with 20 per cent).

Table 5.3 shows the timing of discussions, if any, with employers by type of **main** health condition. People whose main condition was their mental health were less likely to discuss their condition with the employer than those with other types of main condition.

There was a wide variety of reasons why some employees had **not** discussed their health condition with their employer, even though it had affected their ability to do the job. The most commonly mentioned reason, cited by 12 per cent of employees who had not discussed their condition with their employer, was that it was ‘personal’ and they did not wish to discuss it. Other responses included feeling it was not relevant or that there was no need to discuss it (eight per cent);

that they had not realised it was a problem (seven per cent); their employer was not interested, did not care or was not sympathetic (seven per cent); that it came on suddenly (three per cent); that it would have jeopardised their job (three per cent); that they had been made redundant (three per cent); because they had not been working there very long (three per cent); that their employer would not have taken them on if they had known it was a problem (two per cent); or because they wanted to keep their job (one per cent).

**Table 5.3 When employees discussed their condition with their employer after it began to affect their ability to do the job, by type of main condition**

	Mental health %	Musculo-skeletal %	Chronic or systemic %	Other %
Before started the job	11	7	11	6
After started the job but as soon as it became a problem	28	37	32	49
After started job but not until some time after it became a problem	16	14	14	12
Not until the condition became worse	11	14	17	9
Didn't discuss it with employer	37	30	29	26
<i>Base</i>	<i>180</i>	<i>307</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>98</i>

Respondents could give more than one answer.

Base: all respondents in paid work or sick pay prior to their IB claim that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job and who had discussed it with their employer.

## 5.4 Helpfulness of employer

Employees that had discussed their condition were asked how helpful, if at all, their employer had been. In total, two-thirds of employees that had discussed it said that their employer had been either fairly or very helpful. Three out of ten felt that their employer had been either very or fairly unhelpful (Table 5.4). Employees whose condition(s) included mental health were about twice as likely as those with only physical conditions or disability to say that their employer was unhelpful.

Table 5.4 Helpfulness of employer

	%
Very helpful	47
Fairly helpful	20
Fairly unhelpful	10
Very unhelpful	20
Don't know/can't remember	3
Total	100
Base	513

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents in paid work or sick pay immediately prior to their IB claim that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job and who had discussed this condition with their employer.

The helpfulness of the discussions with their employer did not vary significantly by gender, age group, the size of their employer (number of employees) or whether their employer was in the private or public sector. However, it did vary according to whether the employee had a permanent or a temporary job.

People whose job was temporary were significantly less likely than those whose job was permanent to report that the discussion had been very helpful. Thus, whereas 50 per cent of employees with permanent posts said their employer was very helpful, among temporary employees only 28 per cent said so. People with temporary jobs (21 per cent) were more likely than those with permanent contracts (nine per cent) to say that the discussion with their employer had been fairly unhelpful.

Employees with mental health problems were less likely to say that their employer had been either very (40 per cent) or fairly (16 per cent) helpful when compared with those who had only physical health problems (51 per cent and 23 per cent respectively). Conversely, they were also more likely to say that their employer had been either fairly (15 per cent) or very (26 per cent) unhelpful compared with employees who had had only physical health problems (seven per cent and 15 per cent respectively).

A similar pattern emerged in relation to the **main** type of health condition or disability. People whose main condition was their mental health were less likely than those with other types of main condition to say that their employer had been helpful; and they were more likely to report that their employer had been unhelpful (Table 5.5).

**Table 5.5 Helpfulness of employer by type of main health condition or disability**

	Mental health %	Musculo-skeletal %	Chronic or systemic %	Other %
Very helpful	36	45	57	49
Fairly helpful	14	28	15	15
Fairly unhelpful	16	8	7	15
Very unhelpful	28	17	19	18
Don't know/can't remember	5	3	3	3
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>113</i>	<i>213</i>	<i>107</i>	<i>72</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents in paid work or sick pay immediately prior to their IB claim that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job and who had discussed this condition with their employer.

## 5.5 Occupational health services

Recent IB claimants who were 'employees' – that is, were either in paid work or on sick leave from their work immediately prior to their claim – **and** had at least one condition which affected their ability to do their job, were asked if they had access to occupational health services through their employer.

In total, 27 per cent of them reported that they did have such access, 71 per cent that they did not, and two per cent that they did not know whether or not they did. Among those who knew, female employees were more likely to have had access to occupational health services through their employer (33 per cent) than were men (24 per cent). Access to occupational health broadly increased with age, rising from 13 per cent among employees aged under 25, to 34 per cent among those aged from 45 to 54 years and 30 per cent among people aged 55 or more.

Employees with permanent job contracts were significantly more likely to report access to occupational health services (30 per cent) than were those with temporary jobs (17 per cent). Perhaps not surprisingly, employees working for larger firms were much more likely to have access to occupational health services via their employer than those working for smaller firms. The proportion having access to such services increased from nine per cent of employees working for firms of less than ten staff, to 57 per cent of those working for firms with 1,000 or more staff (Table 5.6).

**Table 5.6    Access to occupational health services, by size of employer**

	Number of employees					Don't know %
	1 to 9 %	10 to 49 %	50 to 249 %	250 to 999 %	1,000+ %	
Access	9	12	24	29	57	16
No access	91	88	76	71	43	84
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Base	78	146	107	77	203	[49]

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents in paid work or sick pay immediately prior to their IB claim that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job.

Employees working in the public sector were very much more likely to have access to occupational health than those working for private firms or other types of employer such as voluntary organisations. Sixty per cent of employees working in the public sector, compared with only 18 per cent for private firms, had access to occupational health services via their employer (Table 5.7).

**Table 5.7    Access to occupational health services, by type of employer**

	Type of employer		
	Private sector %	Public sector %	Other/don't know %
Access	18	60	27
No access	82	40	73
Total	100	100	100
Base	459	180	[22]

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents in paid work or sick pay immediately prior to their IB claim that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job.

Employees that had access to occupational health through their employer were asked if they discussed their condition(s) with the service. Just over seven out of ten (71 per cent) had discussed it with occupational health and the remainder (29 per cent) had not.

In total, about eight out of ten employees that had discussed their health condition or disability with occupational health found it helpful, with 24 per cent reporting that it was fairly helpful and 55 per cent that it was very helpful (Table 5.8). Altogether, 20 per cent said they were either fairly or very unhelpful. It is not clear from the survey data why the occupational health service was thought to be

unhelpful by some respondents. However, the qualitative study found that some respondents felt the occupational health service could not be entirely objective about their health because, ultimately, it was on the employer's side (Sainsbury and Davidson, 2006; see also TUC, 2002).

**Table 5.8 Helpfulness of occupational health services received via employer**

	%
Very helpful	55
Fairly helpful	23
Fairly unhelpful	11
Very unhelpful	9
Don't know/can't remember	1
Total	100
Base	144

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents in paid work or sick pay immediately prior to their IB claim that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job and who had used occupational health services provided by their employer.

## 5.6 Changes to working conditions

Only one in six (16 per cent) of employees whose health or disability affected their ability to do their work reported that any changes had been made to their job or working arrangements to help accommodate their condition. Instead, the great majority (83 per cent) reported that no changes of that kind had been made.<sup>17</sup>

Women were significantly more likely to have had workplace adaptations (21 per cent) than were men (12 per cent). However, there was no consistent pattern across age groups as to whether changes had been made. There were also no differences between employees that had only physical health conditions and those who also or only had mental health problems in whether workplace adjustments had been made.

However, people with permanent employment contracts were three times as likely as those with temporary jobs to report that changes had been made to their working conditions (18 per cent compared with six per cent). On the whole, people working for larger employers were more likely to report that changes had been made than those working for smaller ones. Meanwhile, employees in the public sector were much more likely than those employed by private firms to say that changes had been made (25 per cent compared with 14 per cent).

<sup>17</sup> One per cent said they did not know or could not remember if changes had been made.



Among those employees who reported that changes had been made, about a third (35 per cent) said that their duties had been altered and another third (33 per cent) that the number or the pattern of their working hours had been adjusted (Table 5.9). Other changes included adaptations or the provision of special equipment (14 per cent) and being allowed to take emergency leave (seven per cent).

**Table 5.9    Workplace adaptations**

	%
Change of duties	35
Change of number of hours	24
Change in pattern of hours	9
Allowed to take emergency leave	6
Equipment provided/adapted	14
Other changes	13
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>168</i>

Column percentages. Respondents could list more than one type of adaptation.  
Base: all respondents in paid work or sick pay immediately prior to their IB claim that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job and whose employers had adapted the workplace to accommodate their health condition.

Male employees were more likely to have had a change of workplace duties (42 per cent) than were females (31 per cent). Women, on the other hand, were more likely to have had changes made to the number of hours that they worked (26 per cent) than were their male counterparts (19 per cent). They were also more likely to have had changes made to the pattern of hours (ten per cent) worked than were their male counterparts (seven per cent) and to have had equipment provided or adapted (16 per cent) than were male claimants (ten per cent).

Table 5.10 shows that people working for private sector employers were more likely than those working for public sector employers to have had a change in duties or a change in the pattern of hours worked. Those working in the public sector more often had their number of hours changed compared with those in private firms. Equipment or other adaptations were more often provided for public sector employees.

**Table 5.10 Workplace adaptations by type of employer**

	Type of employer	
	Private %	Public %
Change of duties	38	32
Change of number of hours	20	28
Change in pattern of hours	12	3
Allowed to take emergency leave	8	5
Equipment provided/adapted	12	18
Other changes	11	14
<i>Base</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>60</i>

Column percentages. Respondents could list more than one type of adaptation.

Base: all respondents in paid work or sick pay immediately prior to their IB claim that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job and whose employers had adapted the workplace to accommodate their health condition.

People with permanent contracts of employment were more likely to have had a change of duties (36 per cent) than those on temporary contracts (28 per cent) and were more often provided with equipment or adaptations (14 per cent) than temporary employees (four per cent). People in a temporary job, however, more often had a change made to the number of hours they worked (38 per cent) when compared with those with permanent tenure (23 per cent).

People with mental ill-health were less likely to report having had their duties changed (26 per cent) than were claimants with only physical health problems (44 per cent). However, they were more likely to report that the number of hours they worked had been changed (26 per cent) than were those with only physical health problems (21 per cent) and that their pattern of hours had been altered (11 per cent) than were people with only physical health problems (six per cent).

Employees with a constant health condition more often said that their duties had been changed (40 per cent) than did people with a fluctuating condition (31 per cent). They were also more likely to report having equipment provided or adaptations made to their work environment (16 per cent) than people with a fluctuating condition (12 per cent). On the other hand, those with a fluctuating health condition more often said that they had been allowed to take emergency leave (ten per cent) than claimants with a constant condition (two per cent).

Around a third (35 per cent) of employees who reported that changes had been made to their working conditions said the alterations were made after they discussed their health condition or disability with their employer. Almost three out of ten (29 per cent) said the changes were made as soon as the condition started and just under a quarter (23 per cent) after they had taken time off work. About one in ten (nine per cent) reported that the changes were made after discussing the problem with the occupational health service (Table 5.11).

**Table 5.11    Timing of workplace adaptations**

	%
When condition started	29
After discussions with employer	35
After discussions with occupational health	9
After discussions with trades union	3
After taking time off sick	23
After some other point	2
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>140</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents in paid work or sick pay immediately prior to their IB claim that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job and whose employers had adapted the workplace to accommodate their health condition.

Male employees were more likely to report that workplace changes had been made when their condition had started (34 per cent) than were women (25 per cent), and were also more likely to report that changes had been made after discussions with employers (42 per cent) than their female counterparts (30 per cent). Female claimants on the other hand were more likely to have had changes made after discussions with trades unions (five per cent) and taking time off sick (26 per cent) than their male counterparts (0 per cent and 18 per cent respectively).

On the whole, younger people were less likely than older people to have had workplace changes made when their condition first started. For example, only six per cent of 16-24 year olds and eight per cent of 25-34 year olds had had changes made when their condition had started, whilst 37 per cent of 45-54 year olds and 26 per cent of people over 54 had had changes made at this point. However, 16-24 year old employees were more likely to report changes being made after they had taken time off work sick (53 per cent), whilst employees aged 35-44 were the least likely (16 per cent) to have reported changes at that point.

People with permanent employment contracts were less likely to have had changes made once their condition had started (28 per cent) compared to those with temporary positions (39 per cent), but were more likely to have had changes made after taking time off work sick (23 per cent) compared to those with temporary jobs (13 per cent).

Employees with mental ill-health were less likely to have had changes made when their condition started (24 per cent) than were people with only physical health problems (33 per cent), but were more likely to have had changes made after discussion with occupational health (11 per cent) and trades unions (seven per cent). Meanwhile, employees with a constant health condition were more likely to have had workplace changes made when their condition had started (35 per cent) than were people with a fluctuating condition (21 per cent). However, claimants

with a fluctuating condition were more likely to have had changes or adaptations made after discussions with an employer (39 per cent) than were people with a constant condition (30 per cent).

## 5.7 Whether changes helped

Three-quarters (75 per cent) of employees who reported that changes had been made to their working conditions in order to accommodate their health problem or disability said that it had helped them to keep working longer than might otherwise have been possible. Just under a quarter (24 per cent) felt that the changes made had not helped them to remain in work for any longer than they would otherwise have been able to.

Almost one in five (19 per cent) employees said that other changes could have helped them to stay in work for longer, if they had been made. This was especially so among people with mental health conditions compared with those with only physical conditions (26 per cent compared with 13 per cent). Just under three-fifths (58 per cent) of employees did in fact ask their employer to make such changes. There were no statistically significant differences between people with mental health conditions and those with only physical conditions, in whether people asked their employer to make these changes.

As Table 5.12 shows, the most commonly mentioned changes that would have helped were changes in duties (39 per cent) and changes in the number (16 per cent) or the pattern of hours (seven per cent) of work, or the provision of equipment or making of adaptations (12 per cent).

**Table 5.12 Changes that would have helped people to remain in work for longer**

	%
Change of duties	39
Change of number of hours	16
Change in pattern of hours	7
Allowed to take emergency leave	2
Equipment provided/adapted	12
Other changes	23
Don't know	2
Total	100
Base	180

Column percentages. Respondents could list more than one adaptation.

Base: all respondents in paid work or sick pay immediately prior to their IB claim that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job.

Male employees were more likely to say (45 per cent) that a change of duties would have helped them to stay in work for longer than were their female counterparts (33 per cent). Female claimants on the other hand more often said that the provision of equipment or other adaptations would have helped them (14 per cent) than did males (ten per cent).

People living as part of a couple with children were the most likely to report that a change of duties would have helped them to remain in work for longer (47 per cent) whilst those living alone and couples with no children were least likely to say this (34 per cent). Employees living alone were more likely to say that a change in the number of hours would have helped them to remain in work longer (29 per cent) than other household types, especially lone parents (11 per cent). Twenty per cent of claimants who were single, but not living alone, would have benefited from equipment or other workplace adaptations. Over a third (35 per cent) of lone parents cited 'other' changes (which may possibly include child care).

People working in the voluntary or 'other' sectors were more likely to say that a change of duties would have enabled them to stay in work for longer (49 per cent) than were respondents who worked in the public (30 per cent) and the private (40 per cent) sectors. They were also more likely to have said that the provision of equipment or some other adaptation would have helped them to remain in work longer (30 per cent) than were those in the public (15 per cent) and private (nine per cent) sectors.

People with permanent contracts were more likely to have said that a change of duties might have made it possible for them to remain in work longer (39 per cent) than were respondents with temporary jobs (35 per cent). They were also more likely to say that a change in the number of hours might have enabled them to remain in work for longer (18 per cent) compared with those with temporary jobs (two per cent).

Employees with only physical health problems were more likely to say that a change of duties would have helped them to remain in work longer (50 per cent) than were people with mental ill-health (32 per cent). Respondents with mental ill-health on the other hand more often said that a change in the number of hours worked (19 per cent) would have helped them to remain in work compared to those without mental ill-health (11 per cent).

## 5.8 Consulting others

Just over two-thirds (68 per cent) of employees had consulted other people beside their employer about the effect of their health condition on their ability to do their job. Thirty-one per cent had not consulted anyone else and one per cent could not remember or did not know.

Female employees were more likely than their male counterparts to have consulted people other than their employer about the effects of their health condition on

their ability to do their job (74 per cent compared with 64 per cent). There were no significant differences in this respect between employees by age group. However, employees with mental ill-health were more likely (74 per cent) to have consulted people other than their employer than those with only physical health problems (65 per cent).

Employees in permanent jobs were no more or less likely than those in temporary ones to report having consulted someone other than their employer or occupational health service. But people living in areas of high unemployment were less likely to have consulted anyone else about the effects of their health on their employment (63 per cent) than were respondents in medium (72 per cent) and low (70 per cent) areas of unemployment. Employees working for firms with less than ten workers were the least likely (58 per cent), and those working in firms with 1,000 or more staff (77 per cent), were the most likely to have consulted others.

Most commonly, people had consulted their GPs (83 per cent). Almost two-fifths (38 per cent) had been to see another health professional (see below). Thirteen per cent had spoken to a relative or friend, six per cent to a colleague at work, and eight per cent to a trades union official. Only four per cent had contacted an advice centre (Table 5.13).

**Table 5.13 Who recent claimants consulted about the effect of their health condition on their ability to do their job\***

	%
Trades union official	8
Work colleague	6
Advice centre	4
GP	83
Other health professional	38
Relative or friend	13
Someone else	4
<i>Base</i>	786

\* Other than their employer or its occupational health service.

Base: all respondents other than the self-employed that had at least one condition that affected their ability to do their job.

Among those who had consulted 'other health professionals' (that is, apart from their GP), seven out of ten had seen a hospital doctor or consultant. One in six (17 per cent) had visited a physiotherapist and a similar proportion (16 per cent) had seen an occupational health worker. Seven per cent had spoken to a mental health nurse and four per cent to a practice nurse. Thirteen per cent had seen someone else.



## 6 Claiming Incapacity Benefit

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores certain aspects of the background to people's recent claim for Incapacity Benefit (IB). It looks at whether this was their first ever claim or they had claimed on a previous occasion and whether first-time claimants had been told about IB (and, if so, by whom) or knew about it already. It also examines three routes onto IB. Finally, the chapter looks at how long people had initially expected to be on this benefit and whether they were receiving it at the time of their interview for this study, approximately six months after their recent claim.

### 6.2 Summary

- Just over two-thirds (68 per cent) of recent claimants were claiming IB for the first-time and almost a third (32 per cent) were repeat claimants.
- About three-fifths (57 per cent) of first-time claimants had been told about IB by someone and two-fifths (40 per cent) already knew about it.
- The most common informant among first-time claimants who had been told about IB was Jobcentre Plus (36 per cent). Other commonly cited informants were employers (17 per cent), relatives or friends (16 per cent) and General Practitioners (GPs) (12 per cent).
- Just over half of recent claimants had either been working (23 per cent) or off sick from their job (33 per cent) immediately prior to their recent claim for IB. Two-thirds of the remainder had been getting Income Support (IS) or Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) immediately prior to their claim for IB.
- Altogether, around a third (32 per cent) of all recent IB claimants had been getting IS or JSA (or both), either immediately prior to their claim or at some other point in the previous two years.



- Just over half (53 per cent) of recent claimants had moved onto IB from being in work (either working or off sick from their job). Around another quarter (26 per cent) had claimed incapacity from ‘non-work’ but had nonetheless been in work at some point in the previous two years. About a fifth (21 per cent) had come from non-work and had not worked for at least two years or had never worked.
- When asked how long they had initially expected to be on IB, the most common response (given by 37 per cent of recent claimants) was that they did not know. A third (33 per cent) had expected to remain on IB for less than six months. About one in ten (nine per cent) thought it would be at least a year and a similar proportion (11 per cent) did not ever expect to return to work.
- Approximately six months after their claim, just over half (53 per cent) of recent claimants were receiving IB. One in five (20 per cent) were no longer claiming IB, one in fourteen said they were still waiting for their claim to be processed (seven per cent), and the remainder (20 per cent) had their claim rejected.

### 6.3 New versus repeat claims

Around two-thirds (68 per cent) of respondents reported that their recent claim was their first ever claim for IB. The remaining third (32 per cent) had claimed on a previous occasion (Table 6.1).

Among repeat claimants, 58 per cent had previously claimed within the last two years, while the remaining 42 per cent had claimed two or more years before their recent claim for IB. They accounted for 18 per cent and 13 per cent respectively of all recent claimants (Table 6.1). Thus, there appears to be a considerable amount of ‘churning’ among IB claimants, with a substantial minority of them claiming more than once.

**Table 6.1    Whether claimed IB before their recent claim**

	All %
First ever claim	68
Claimed before – in last two years	18
Claimed before – but not in last two years	13
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,843</i>

Base: all respondents.

A significantly higher proportion of women than men were first-time claimants (72 per cent compared with 65 per cent). People under 35 years of age, and especially those aged under 25, were more likely to be first-time IB claimants

than people older than that. Thus, eight out of ten recent claimants aged under 25, and seven out of ten aged 25 to 34, were first-time claimants, compared with about six out of ten aged 35 and over. People who described themselves as white were less likely than those from other ethnic backgrounds to be first-time claimants (Table 6.2).

**Table 6.2 Whether claimed IB before, by personal characteristics**

	First ever claim	Claimed before	Total	Base
<b>Gender</b>				
Men	65	35	100	1,085
Women	72	28	100	758
<b>Age group</b>				
16 to 24	82	19	100	265
25 to 34	75	25	100	284
35 to 44	65	35	100	390
45 to 54	61	39	100	472
55+	65	35	100	424
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	68	32	100	1,687
Other	74	26	100	156

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

Recent IB claimants who were owner-occupiers were more likely to be first-time claimants than either private or social renters. The figures were 73 per cent, 64 per cent and 64 per cent respectively.

Among recent claimants who had worked in the previous two years, people whose current or most recent job was permanent were significantly more likely than those whose job was temporary, to be a first-time claimant of IB. Thus, 73 per cent of people whose job was permanent were first-time claimants, compared with only 60 per cent of people whose job was temporary. Conversely, 27 per cent of recent claimants who had worked in the previous two years and whose most recent job was permanent, were repeat claimants, as were 40 per cent of people whose job was temporary (Table 6.3).

**Table 6.3    Whether respondents had claimed IB before, by work characteristics**

	First ever claim	Claimed before	Total	Base
<b>Job tenure</b>				
Permanent	73	27	100	1,152
Temporary	60	40	100	297
<b>Number of jobs in last two years</b>				
One	72	28	100	1,017
Two or more	67	34	100	439
None	53	47	100	306
<b>Most of working life</b>				
Steady jobs or self-employed	73	27	100	1,021
Other situations	65	35	100	420

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents who had worked in the previous two years.

Among people who had had only one job in the previous two years, 72 per cent were first-time claimants and 28 per cent repeat claimants of IB. By contrast, only 67 per cent of people who had had two or more jobs in the last two years were first-time claimants. Among people who had not had any jobs, the proportion of first-time claimants was even lower, at 53 per cent. In other words, almost half (47 per cent) of people who had not worked in the previous two years were repeat claimants (Table 6.3).

Finally, among people who had worked, those who said they had spent most of their working life in steady jobs or self-employed were more likely than other respondents to be first-time claimants. Thus, three-quarters of people who had mainly had steady jobs or had spent most of their working life in self-employment were first-time claimants, compared with two-thirds of other people (Table 6.3).

### 6.4      Awareness of Incapacity Benefit

First time claimants were asked if someone had told them about IB before they claimed or whether they were already aware that it existed. The majority of people had been told about IB before they submitted a claim: 57 per cent had been told about it by someone and 40 per cent already knew it existed.

There were no statistically significant differences by gender or age in whether first-time claimants had been told about IB or knew about it already. However, more first-time claimants who described their ethnic origin as white already knew about IB than was the case for other people. Thus, 43 per cent of white respondents already knew about IB and 57 per cent had been told about it by someone. Among other people, the figures were 23 per cent and 77 per cent respectively.

**Table 6.4 Whether first-time claimants already knew or had been told about IB**

	All %
Someone told me about IB	57
Was already aware of IB	40
Don't know or can't remember	3
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,256</i>

Base: respondents whose recent claim was their first ever claim for IB.

First-time claimants who had been told about IB by someone, were asked who that was. As Table 6.5 shows, the most common source of this information was Jobcentre Plus, which was mentioned by just over a third of first-time claimants who had been told about IB. A sixth of first-time claimants who had been informed about IB said that a work colleague had told them about it. A similar proportion reported that a relative or friend had done so. GPs were mentioned by 12 per cent of first time claimants who had been told about IB, while six percent mentioned other health professionals including hospital doctors or consultants, occupational health services, practice nurses and mental health nurses.

**Table 6.5 Who told first-time claimants about IB?**

	All %
Jobcentre Plus	36
Employer	17
Relative or friend	16
GP	12
Advice centre worker	7
Other health professional	6
Work colleague	1
Trades union	1
Someone else	7
Don't know or can't remember	1
<i>Base</i>	<i>804</i>

Base: first-time claimants who had been told about IB before their claim.  
Respondents could give more than one answer.

6.5 Work and benefit status prior to claiming

An important aim of the study was to explore people’s routes onto IB. For example, were respondents in work – either working or off sick from their job prior to their recent claim? If they had not been in work, were they receiving IS or JSA?

Immediately prior to their recent claim for IB, 23 per cent of respondents had been working, either in paid employment or in self-employment. A further 33 per cent had been off sick from their job. Thus over half of all recent claimants had moved from paid work – often via a period of sick leave – onto IB (Table 6.6).

**Table 6.6 Work and benefit status prior to recent IB claim**

	% of all recent IB claimants	% of those not in work
Working	23	-
Off sick from work	33	-
Not in work, but getting IS or JSA	28	64
Not in work, but not getting IS or JSA	16	36
Total	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,836</i>	<i>802</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents except those not in work who did not know or could not remember whether they were getting IS or JSA prior to their IB claim.

Approximately two-thirds (64 per cent) of respondents who were neither working nor off sick from their work, were receiving IS, JSA or both IS and JSA immediately prior to their recent claim for IB. The remaining 36 per cent were getting neither benefit. Expressed as a proportion of all recent claimants for IB, 28 per cent were getting IS or JSA, and 16 per cent were getting neither, immediately prior to their recent IB claim (Table 6.6).

However, despite having a job, some of the people who had come onto IB after being off sick from work, had been receiving IS or JSA immediately prior to their recent claim. That is because some of them were being paid neither their normal pay nor sick pay while off sick from work.

As Table 6.7 shows, prior to their recent IB claim, four per cent of all respondents were off sick and being paid as normal and a further 14 per cent were receiving sick pay. Meanwhile, ten per cent of recent claimants were off sick from employment, but not receiving either their normal pay or sick pay, and six per cent were self-employed but not working due to sickness. In total, therefore, only just over half (53 per cent) of people who had been off sick from work prior to their IB claim were getting normal or sick pay. Almost three out of ten (29 per cent) people who had been off sick from work had been getting either IS or JSA immediately prior to their IB claim.

In total, around a third (32 per cent) of all recent claimants of IB were getting IS, JSA or both IS and JSA immediately prior to their claim. Eleven per cent of recent claimants were getting IS, 21 per cent were getting JSA, and one per cent were getting both IS and JSA.

**Table 6.7 Work and benefit status prior to recent IB claim**

	% of all recent IB claimants	% of those off sick
Working	23	-
Off sick and getting paid as normal	4	12
Off sick and getting sick pay	14	41
Off sick but not getting paid as normal or sick pay	10	30
Self-employed but not in work due to sickness	6	17
Others	44	-
Total	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,843</i>	<i>613</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents.

In addition, some people who were not getting IS or JSA immediately prior to their recent claim for IB, nonetheless were in receipt of IS or JSA at some other point in the previous two years. In fact, half of all recent claimants of IB had been getting IS or JSA either immediately prior to their claim or at some other point in the previous two years (Table 6.8). This included three out of ten people working or off sick from work prior to their recent claim.

**Table 6.8 Whether respondents had received Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance in the two years before their IB claim**

Employment status prior to claim	Receiving IS or JSA in past 2 years?			
	No	Yes	Total	Base
Working	69	31	100	421
Off sick from work	70	30	100	613
Not in work, but getting IS or JSA	0	100	100	514
Not in work, but not getting IS or JSA	74	26	100	288
All recent IB claimants	51	49	100	1,836

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents.

Thus, a substantial minority of the people who had been working or off sick from their work immediately prior to their recent claim for IB had received IS or JSA at some point during the previous two years. This suggests that there is not a clear-

cut boundary between work and out of work benefit receipt in the pathway to claiming IB.

### 6.6 Routes onto Incapacity Benefit

The qualitative study that preceded this survey of recent claimants found that there were three main routes onto IB (Sainsbury and Davidson, 2006). These were:

- work to IB;
- non-work to IB;
- work to non-work to IB.

Thus, while some people moved onto IB after having been in work (including those who were off sick from their job), others had moved from a non-work status. However, some of the non-work group had previously been in work, e.g. people who had lost their job after becoming ill but before they claimed IB.

Because the earlier study was based on qualitative interviews, it was not possible to quantify the relative sizes of these three groups of recent IB claimants. For this study, people were allocated to the ‘work to IB’ route if they were in work or off sick from work immediately prior to their claim for IB.<sup>18</sup> They were allocated to the ‘non-work to IB’ route if they were neither in work nor off sick from their job immediately prior to their recent claim **and** had not had a job in the previous two years. Finally, people were allocated to the ‘work to non-work to IB’ route if they were neither in work nor off sick from their job immediately prior to their recent claim, but did have a job in the previous two years.

As Table 6.9 shows, on these definitions about half of recent IB claimants had come from the ‘work to IB’ route, a quarter from the ‘work to non-work to IB’ route, and a fifth from the ‘non-work to IB’ route.

**Table 6.9 Routes onto Incapacity Benefit**

Route	%
Work	53
Work to non-work	26
Non-work	21
Total	100
Base	1,843

Column percentages.  
Base: all respondents.

<sup>18</sup> One per cent of respondents in this group said they had not worked in the previous two years and hence were allocated to the ‘non-work to IB’ route.

**Table 6.10 Routes onto Incapacity Benefit, by personal characteristics**

	Work	Work to non-work	Non-work	Total	Base
<b>Gender</b>					
Men	54	28	18	100	1,085
Women	52	24	25	100	757
<b>Age group</b>					
16 to 24	33	41	26	100	265
25 to 34	48	30	22	100	285
35 to 44	51	25	24	100	391
45 to 54	58	21	21	100	472
55+	65	21	14	100	424
<b>Ethnicity</b>					
White	55	25	20	100	1,688
Other	33	32	36	100	155

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

Women were significantly more likely to have moved onto IB via the non-work route and men more likely via the other two routes. Respondents who described themselves as being white were very much more likely than people from other ethnic backgrounds to have moved onto IB from the work route and much less likely via the non-work route (Table 6.10).

The importance of the work route increased by age, rising from 33 per cent among young people under 25, to 65 per cent among respondents aged 55 or more. The work to non-work route onto IB decreased with age, falling from 41 per cent among people under 25 to only 21 per cent among those aged 45 and over. The non-work route also broadly decreased with age, falling from 26 per cent among those aged under 25 to 14 per cent among people aged 55 or more (Table 6.10).

Routes onto IB also varied by whether recent claimants' health condition was related to their mental or their physical health. Recent claimants whose main or only condition was their mental health were less likely than other people to have moved onto IB from the work route. Meanwhile, respondents who had only physical health conditions were significantly less likely than other recent claimants to have followed the non-work route (Table 6.11).



Table 6.11 Routes onto Incapacity Benefit, by health condition

	Work	Work to non-work	Non-work	Total	Base
Mental health is the only condition	49	27	25	100	142
Mental health is the main condition	48	29	24	100	322
Mental health is not the main condition	54	22	24	100	322
Physical health is the only condition	57	25	18	100	991

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability.

Recent claimants whose current or most recent job within the last two years was permanent were much more likely than those whose job was temporary to have moved onto IB from the work route. Thus, while 72 per cent of people with permanent job tenure had come from work, the figure was only 49 per cent for respondents whose job was temporary. Conversely, only 28 per cent of people whose job was permanent had come via the work to non-work route, as had 52 per cent of those with a temporary job<sup>19</sup> (Table 6.12).

Recent claimants living in high unemployment areas were less likely to have moved onto IB via the work route and more likely via the non-work route. Thus, only 44 per cent of people in high unemployment areas, compared with 59 per cent in medium and 60 per cent in low unemployment areas, had followed the work route onto IB. The figures for the non-work route were 28 per cent (high unemployment), 17 per cent (medium) and 14 per cent (low unemployment) respectively (Table 6.12).

Finally, compared with other people, a much higher proportion of recent claimants with a partner that was working (and not off sick) had moved onto IB via the work route and a much lower proportion via the non-work route. People with no partner were the least likely to have followed the work route and the most likely to have moved onto IB from the non-work route (Table 6.12).

<sup>19</sup> None had moved onto IB from the non-work route because this question was asked only of people who had worked in the previous two years.

**Table 6.12 Routes onto Incapacity Benefit, by work characteristics**

	Work	Work to non-work	Non-work	Total	Base
<b>Job tenure*</b>					
Permanent	72	28	-	100	1,153
Temporary	49	52	-	100	297
<b>Unemployment</b>					
High	44	28	28	100	732
Medium	59	24	17	100	894
Low	60	26	14	100	217
<b>Partner status</b>					
Working	73	21	6	100	461
Not working	54	23	22	100	399
No partner	43	29	27	100	976

\* This question was asked only of people who had worked in the previous two years, hence there is no data for people in the 'non-work' route.

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

## 6.7 Expectations about likely claim duration

Rates of exit from IB decline with the duration of the claim and relatively few people leave this benefit after having claimed it for a year (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2002). Indeed, some people have argued that IB has acted as an early retirement scheme for older workers. Recent claimants were therefore asked how long they initially expected to be on IB when they made their claim.

In fact, only one in ten recent claimants (11 per cent) said they did not expect to return to work when they first claimed IB. In contrast, 37 per cent said they did not know how long they might remain on IB when they submitted their recent claim. A further 33 per cent reported that they had initially expected to remain on the benefit for less than six months (Table 6.13).

**Table 6.13** How long people initially expected to be on IB

	%
Less than 3 months	20
3 months but less than 6 months	13
6 months but less than 12 months	11
1 year but less than 2 years	5
2 or more years	4
Did not expect to return to work	11
Did not know	37
Total	100
Base	1,843

Base: all respondents.  
Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

There were no statistically significant differences in initial benefit duration expectations by gender or ethnic background. However, the proportions of new claimants who did not expect to return to work increased progressively by age group, from two per cent among people aged under 25 years, to 22 per cent among those aged 55 and over. In other words, the older people were, the more likely they were to think that they would never return to work.

**Table 6.14** How long people initially expected to be on IB, by routes onto IB

	Work	Work to non-work	Non-work
Less than 6 months	38	36	20
6 months but less than 12 months	10	12	9
1 year or more years	8	8	13
Did not expect to return to work	9	9	16
Did not know	35	35	42
Total	100	100	100
Base	979	477	387

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents.

Recent claimants’ initial expectations also varied according to their route onto IB. People who had moved onto IB via the non-work route were more likely than those who came from the other two routes, to say they would be receiving it for more than a year or that they did not expect to return to work. They were also more likely to report that they did not know how long they might be on IB (Table 6.14).

Table 6.15 shows how long recent claimants initially expected to be on IB by their main type of health condition or disability. People whose main condition was mental health were less likely than those with other types of main condition to say that they did not expect to return to work. They were also more likely to say that they did not know how long they might be on this benefit. Among people who had **only** mental health problems, just two per cent said they did not expect to return to work and 47 per cent reported that they did not know how long they would be on IB.

**Table 6.15 How long people initially expected to be on IB, by type of main health**

	Mental health %	Musculo- skeletal %	Chronic or systemic %	Other %
Less than 6 months	30	36	29	35
6 months but less than 12 months	11	10	10	11
1 year or more years	9	9	9	9
Did not expect to return to work	5	13	16	11
Didn't know	45	32	36	35
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>463</i>	<i>671</i>	<i>348</i>	<i>257</i>

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability.

## 6.8 Receiving Incapacity Benefit

The interviews for this study were completed approximately six months after respondents had made their recent claim for IB. Consequently, some people may have ceased claiming this benefit, perhaps because they had recovered from the injury or illness that had prevented them from working or because of some other reason. Indeed, as Table 6.13 showed, a third of recent claimants said they initially expected to be on IB for less than six months. Others may have had their claim rejected after having completed their Personal Capability Assessment in the period since the sample was drawn.

In fact, by the time they were interviewed, almost half (47 per cent) of recent claimants were **not** receiving IB. In most cases, this was either because their claim had been rejected (20 per cent) or because they had ceased claiming it (20 per cent). The remainder (seven per cent) said they were still waiting for their claim to be processed (Table 6.16).

Table 6.16 Whether recent claimants were receiving IB at interview

	%
Yes, receiving IB	53
No, claim is still being processed	7
No, claim was rejected	20
No, no longer claiming IB	20
Total	100
Base	1,843

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents.

There were no statistically significant differences by gender or ethnic background in whether recent claimants were receiving IB when they were interviewed for the survey. However, once again there were significant differences by age group. Younger age groups were less likely to be receiving IB when they were interviewed than were older age groups. Indeed, the proportion receiving IB increased progressively by age group, from only a third among respondents aged under 25 to two-thirds among those aged 55 and over (Table 6.17).

Table 6.17 Whether recent claimants were receiving IB at interview, by age group

Age group	Receiving IB	Not receiving IB	Total	Base
16 to 24	32	68	100	266
25 to 34	47	53	100	285
35 to 44	49	51	100	391
45 to 54	59	41	100	473
55+	66	34	100	424

Row percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 10.

# 7 Work expectations and barriers

## 7.1 Introduction

The Government hopes to reduce the numbers of people on Incapacity Benefit (IB), which remain relatively high despite the decrease in unemployment and increase in employment since the mid-1990s (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2006). One way in which that reduction might be achieved is by increasing the relatively small outflow from IB into paid work. This chapter, therefore, seeks to explore the attitudes and expectations about work held by recent IB claimants and obstacles that they may face in finding a job.

## 7.2 Summary

- By the time of their interview – approximately six months after their recent claim for IB – 14 per cent of respondents had moved into work. However, the great majority of recent claimants were either off sick, unemployed or economically inactive.
- The cohort of recent claimants of IB had become substantially more detached from the labour market in the subsequent six months, with many people having become economically inactive.
- For example, the proportion describing themselves as permanently off work due to sickness or disability had trebled, rising from nine per cent to 27 per cent. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the respondents who said they were unemployed and looking for work immediately prior to their recent claim, reported that they regarded themselves as being permanently off work due to sickness or disability in the week prior to the interview.

- When asked about their current and likely future work situation, only one per cent of recent claimants said they had been looking for work, but had stopped because they could not find a job. This provides little support for the view that many people on IB are discouraged workers. However, a further 13 per cent said they did not expect to work in the future and it is possible that some of them may be discouraged workers.
- The proportion of people reporting that they were permanently unable to work because of their health or disability increased with age group, as did the proportion who said they did not expect to work in the future.
- Among recent claimants who were not expecting or planning to work in the future, two-fifths said that they were unlikely to get a job because of their health or disability.
- Many respondents who were not expecting to return to work had doubts about their employability. Thus, 14 per cent of them believed there were insufficient jobs in their area for people with their skills; 12 per cent said they did not have the right qualifications or experience to find work; 14 per cent believed they were unlikely to get a job because of their age; and 13 per cent thought that employers would not give them a job because of their sickness record.
- 21 per cent of recent claimants had either literacy problems, numeracy problems or both.
- Fifty-six per cent of recent IB claimants had a full, current driving licence, of whom 82 per cent had access to a car. Thus, in total, 46 per cent of recent claimants had both a driving licence and access to a car.

### 7.3 Work status in the week prior to the interview

All recent claimants in the survey were asked about their employment situation in the week prior to their interview. By the time of their interview – approximately six months after their recent claim for IB – 14 per cent of respondents had moved into work. However, the great majority of recent claimants were either off sick, unemployed or economically inactive (Table 7.1).

Men were somewhat more likely than women to be working (15 per cent compared with 11 per cent). They were also more likely to say they were unemployed and looking for work (11 per cent compared with seven per cent). They were much less likely than women to report that they were looking after the home or children or caring for someone (one per cent compared with 11 per cent).

**Table 7.1 Employment status in the week prior to interview, by age group**

	16-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55+ %	All %
Working – employed or self-employed	12	12	17	13	13	14
Off sick from work	9	15	23	24	30	22
Temporarily sick or injured – no job to return to	17	20	18	19	12	17
Permanently off work due to sickness or disability	19	26	27	30	31	27
Unemployed and looking for work*	21	11	6	7	6	9
Looking after children or home or caring	9	11	6	2	2	5
Other+	14	5	3	6	7	6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Base	265	285	390	473	424	1,843

\* Including on a government scheme (n=8; 0.4%).

+ Including retired (n=21; 1%).

Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

As well as gender, there were significant differences between different age groups in their self-reported employment situation in the previous week. The proportion of recent claimants who said they were off sick from work in the previous week increased by age group. Young people under 25 were significantly less likely than older age groups to regard themselves as permanently off work due to sickness or disability. Young people under 25 – and to a much lesser extent, those aged between 25 to 34 – were significantly more likely than older people to say they were unemployed and looking for work (Table 7.1).

When respondents' employment situation in the previous week was compared with the situation immediately prior to their recent claim for IB, it was apparent that substantial change had taken place. The proportion of people who had a job and were either working or off sick had fallen from 56 per cent immediately prior to their recent claim for IB to only 36 per cent in the previous week. By contrast, the proportion that were sick or injured and had no job to return to, had increased from only four per cent to 17 per cent. Meanwhile, the number of recent claimants who described themselves as permanently off work because of sickness or disability had trebled, rising from nine per cent prior to their claim to 27 per cent in the week prior to the interview (Table 7.2).



**Table 7.2 Employment situation immediately prior to recent IB claim and in the week prior to interview**

	Prior to claim %	Week prior to interview %
Working – employed or self-employed	23	14
Off sick from work	33	22
Temporarily sick or injured – no job to return to	4	17
Permanently off work due to sickness or disability	9	27
Unemployed and looking for work*	19	9
Looking after children or home or caring	6	5
Other+	6	6
Total	100	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,843</i>	<i>1,843</i>

\* Including on a government scheme (n=8; 0.4%).

+ Including retired (n=21; 1%).

Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

Thus, the cohort of recent claimants of IB had become substantially more detached from the labour market in the subsequent six months, with many people having become economically inactive. Table 7.3 illustrates the changes in employment situation in more detail. It reveals significant movement between individual employment situations between the two dates (immediately prior to their recent claim and the week prior to their interview six months later).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the employment situation of people who classified themselves as being permanently off work because of sickness or disability had changed the least over this six month period. Eight out of ten (83 per cent) respondents who reported that they were permanently off work immediately prior to their claim, said the same about their employment status in the week prior to the interview. However, 14 per cent of them had apparently moved closer to the labour market, including two per cent who had found a job (Table 7.3). Thus, a minority of people who initially believed that they were permanently unable to work because of their health or disability were in fact able to return to work.

Around a quarter (26 per cent) of recent claimants who had been in work immediately prior to their recent claim had returned to work (not necessarily in the same job or with the same employer). However, one in six (17 per cent) reported that they were permanently off work due to sickness and disability in the week prior to the interview. Nevertheless, it was the group of people who had been working prior to their claim that remained the closest to the labour market six months later.

Among people who had been off sick from their work, 14 per cent had returned to work, while ten per cent no longer had a job to return to. In addition, about a quarter (23 per cent) could be described as fully detached from the labour market in the sense of seeing themselves as being permanently off work or in the 'other' category (Table 7.3).

People who reported their employment situation as being unemployed and looking for work prior to their recent claim for IB were the group of respondents that were most likely to give a different description of their employment situation in the week prior to the interview. Only a quarter of them said they were still unemployed and looking for work. A further quarter reported that they were now permanently off work due to sickness or disability. Three out of ten said that they were temporarily sick or injured with no job to return to (and presumably no longer looking for work). Meanwhile one in ten was working (Table 7.3).

**Table 7.3 Employment status in the week prior to interview and immediately prior to IB claim**

Prior to interview	Prior to IB claim					
	In work %	Off sick %	Temporarily sick or injured %	Permanently off work %	Unemployed %	Other %
Working – employed or self-employed	26	14	9	2	10	2
Off sick from work	31	39	4	2	3	7
Temporarily sick or injured – no job to return to	14	10	52	8	29	15
Permanently off work due to sickness or disability	17	23	21	83	24	23
Unemployed and looking for work*	7	7	7	2	24	3
Other+	6	7	8	2	9	49
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Base	422	613	77	168	349	217

\* Including on a government scheme.

+ Including looking after the home or children or caring.

Column percentages. Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

There were significant differences in self-reported employment status in the week prior to the interview for the survey between recent claimants whose current or most recent job was permanent and those for whom it was temporary. The latter included jobs with a fixed term contract, seasonal or casual work and other forms of employment that were not permanent, such as agency working. People whose employment was temporary were less likely than those with permanent contracts

to report that they were off sick from a job in the week prior to the interview. They were also more likely to say they were temporarily sick or injured with no job to return to, or that they were unemployed and looking for work (Table 7.4).

**Table 7.4 Employment situation in the week prior to interview by whether current or most recent job was permanent or temporary**

	Permanent %	Temporary %
Working – employed or self-employed	17	14
Off sick from work	30	10
Temporarily sick or injured – no job to return to	14	26
Permanently off work due to sickness or disability	23	23
Unemployed and looking for work*	7	17
Looking after children or home or caring	4	4
Other+	5	6
Total	100	100
Base	1,153	297

\* Including on a government scheme (n=8; 0.4%).

+ Including retired (n=21; 1%).

Totals may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: respondents who had worked in the previous two years.

Recent claimants with both mental and physical health conditions (eight per cent) were significantly less likely than those who had only mental health (14 per cent) or only physical health (17 per cent) problems to be in paid work in the week prior to interview. They were more likely to report being permanently off work due to sickness or disability (33 per cent compared with 22 and 26 per cent respectively).

## 7.4 Work aspirations and expectations

All respondents were presented with a card showing a range of current and likely future work situations and asked which one of them best described their situation. The responses are shown in Table 7.5.

At first sight, the data in Table 7.5 provide little support for the view that large numbers of recent IB claimants are 'discouraged workers'<sup>20</sup> who have given up looking for employment because they cannot find a job. Approximately six months after their recent claim, only one per cent of respondents could be confidently described as falling into that category. A further seven per cent had also stopped looking for work, but that was because their health had deteriorated.

<sup>20</sup> That is, people who had given up looking for work because they had not been able to find a job. See Alcock *et al.* (2003).

**Table 7.5 Work situation and expectations**

	%
I am currently working	14
I have a job to go back to	8
I am waiting to start my new job	2
I am looking for work but have not found a suitable job	11
I was looking for work, but stopped because I can't find one	1
I was looking for work but stopped because my health has deteriorated	7
I hope to do a job in the future but have not started looking yet	18
I would need help, rehabilitation or training before I could consider working	10
I do not expect to work in the future	13
I am permanently unable to work because of my health condition or disability	14
Don't know	4
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,843</i>

Columns may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

One in six (18 per cent) recent claimants said that they hoped to work at some point in the future, but had not yet started looking. Exactly why the latter respondents had not started looking is unclear, but it may of course relate to their health condition. A further ten per cent of respondents reported that they would need some kind of rehabilitation, training or other kind of assistance before they could consider working. At the very least, this suggests that the latter group had not ruled out the possibility of working in the future (Table 7.5).

Fourteen per cent of recent IB claimants said they were permanently unable to work because of their health condition or disability. A further 13 per cent did not expect to work in the future, but whether this was because of their health condition or they were discouraged workers who did not feel they would be able to find a job (or some other reason) is unclear (Table 7.5).

However, it is noteworthy that work expectations did not vary significantly between areas of high, medium and low unemployment. Local authority areas are not necessarily labour market areas, but that caveat aside, these results suggest that, if there is a discouraged worker effect, it is more likely to be operating at the individual rather than the area level.

There were gender differences in respondents' work situation and expectations. Men were more likely than women to report that they were currently working or looking for work. Women were more likely than men to say that they hoped to have a job in the future but had not started looking yet (Table 7.6).

**Table 7.6 Work situation and expectations, by gender**

	Men %	Women %
I am currently working*	18	12
I have a job to go back to	8	9
I am looking for work but have not found a suitable job	13	8
I was looking for work but stopped because my health has deteriorated	7	7
I hope to do a job in the future but have not started looking yet	15	21
I would need help, rehabilitation or training before I could consider working	10	10
I do not expect to work in the future	14	12
I am permanently unable to work because of my health or disability	12	15
Other+	4	5
Total	100	100
Base	1,085	757

\* including waiting to start a new job.

+ 'Don't know' and 'I was looking for work, but stopped because I can't find one'.

Columns may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

**Table 7.7 Work situation and expectations, by ethnic background**

	White %	Other %
I am currently working*	16	10
I have a job to go back to	9	3
I am looking for work but have not found a suitable job	11	10
I was looking for work but stopped because my health has deteriorated	7	4
I hope to do a job in the future but have not started looking yet	17	21
I would need help, rehabilitation or training before I could consider working	9	14
I do not expect to work in the future	13	14
I am permanently unable to work because of my health or disability	13	22
Other+	4	4
Total	100	100
Base	1,686	154

\* including waiting to start a new job.

+ 'Don't know' and 'I was looking for work, but stopped because I can't find one'.

Columns may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

Recent claimants who described their ethnic background as being white were significantly more likely than other people to say they were currently working or had a job to which they could return (Table 7.7). They were also more likely

to report that they had stopped looking for work because their health had deteriorated. Meanwhile, people from ethnic minority groups were more likely than white people to say that they were permanently unable to work because of their health condition or disability.

People in the younger age groups were less likely than those in older ones to say they had a job to go back to. However, respondents under 25 were much more likely than older people to report that they were looking for work but had not yet found a suitable job (Table 7.8).

The proportion of recent claimants saying that they were permanently unable to work because of their health condition or disability increased with age, as did those reporting that they did not expect to work in the future (Table 7.8). The prevalence of more chronic and systemic health conditions increases with age (see Chapter 4), but it is possible that this age effect also reflects expectations about the likelihood of ever finding another job.

Respondents with mental ill-health had some significantly different work expectations from people who had only physical health problems. In particular, those with mental ill-health were less likely to be currently working (12 per cent compared with 18 per cent) or to have a job to which they could return (six per cent compared with 11 per cent). However, respondents with mental ill-health were more likely than those with only physical health conditions to say that they would need help, rehabilitation or other assistance before they could consider working (14 per cent compared with six per cent). The responses for the other categories were broadly the same (Table 7.9).

## 7.5 Barriers to work

Altogether three-fifths of recent claimants did not report being either in work, off sick from their job or permanently unable to work (see Table 7.5). Put differently, these respondents did not have a job (they could return to) but did not regard themselves as being permanently unable to work. They were asked whether any of the statements reproduced in Table 7.10 applied to them. The statements expressed possible barriers to obtaining work related either to their personal situation or the local labour market in which they lived. On average, the number of statements that people said applied to them was 1.6. The first column shows the percentage of respondents to this question who said that the statement applied to them and the second shows them as a percentage of all recent claimants.

**Table 7.8 Work situation and expectations, by age group**

	16-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55+ %
I am currently working*	17	15	19	14	15
I have a job to go back to	3	6	8	12	9
I am looking for work but have not found a suitable job	24	11	8	10	7
I was looking for work but stopped because my health has deteriorated	9	6	8	8	5
I hope to do a job in the future but have not started looking yet	18	27	21	18	9
I would need help, rehabilitation or training before I could consider working	11	17	10	10	4
I do not expect to work in the future	5	4	11	9	30
I am permanently unable to work because of my health condition or disability	8	11	12	15	19
Other+	7	5	4	5	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Base</i>	266	283	390	473	424

\* including waiting to start a new job.

+ 'Don't know' and 'I was looking for work, but stopped because I can't find one'.

Columns may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents.

**Table 7.9 Work situation and expectations, by whether recent claimants had a mental health condition**

	Mental health %	Physical health only %
I am currently working*	12	18
I have a job to go back to	6	11
I am looking for work but have not found a suitable job	10	11
I was looking for work but stopped because my health has deteriorated	8	7
I hope to do a job in the future but have not started looking yet	19	15
I would need help, rehabilitation or training before I could consider working	14	6
I do not expect to work in the future	12	14
I am permanently unable to work because of my health or disability	14	14
Other+	5	3
Total	100	100
Base	786	990

\* including waiting to start a new job.

+ 'Don't know' and 'I was looking for work, but stopped because I can't find one'.

Columns may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Base: all respondents with a health condition or disability.



**Table 7.10 Barriers to work**

	<b>% of those who did not have a job but were not permanently unable to work</b>	<b>% of all recent claimants</b>
There aren't enough job opportunities locally for people with my skills	14	8
I haven't got the right qualifications or experience to find work	12	7
I couldn't get the sort of job I would want	10	6
I am unlikely to get a job because of my age	14	8
I am unlikely to get a job because of my health condition or disability	40	24
I am unlikely to get a job because of my sickness record	13	8
I am unable to work because I look after children or the home	6	3
I am unable to work because I need to look after someone who is frail, sick or disabled	2	1
I would be worse off financially if I got a job	7	4
My confidence about working is low	20	12
None of these	16	10
Don't know	2	1
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,088</i>	<i>1,843</i>

Totals column may exceed 100% because respondents could agree with more than one statement.

Base: people who were not working, off sick from their job or permanently unable to work<sup>21</sup>.

The most common reason why people did not expect to return to work was their health condition or disability. As Table 7.10 shows, two-fifths of respondents who did not expect to return to work agreed with the statement that 'I am unlikely to get a job because of my health condition or disability'. They accounted for a quarter of all recent claimants of IB.

It is also clear from Table 7.10 that many respondents who were not expecting to return to work had doubts of one sort or another about their employability. Thus, 14 per cent of them believed there were insufficient jobs in their area for

<sup>21</sup> As with all responses to the survey, employment status including 'I am permanently unable to work because of my health condition or disability' was self-reported.

people with their skills;<sup>22</sup> 12 per cent said they did not have the right qualifications or experience to find work; 14 per cent believed they were unlikely to get a job because of their age; and 13 per cent thought that employers would not give them a job because of their sickness record.

Some respondents did not expect to work because they believed the jobs they might get were either not the kind they would want (ten per cent) or would make them worse off financially (seven per cent). A small minority of respondents reported that they were unavailable for work because they were looking after children or their home (six per cent) or caring for someone who was sick, frail or disabled (two per cent). Finally, one in five respondents who were not looking for, or expecting to get, a job reported that their confidence about working was low. They accounted for 12 per cent of all recent IB claimants (Table 7.10).

There were significant gender differences in whether or not people agreed with the statements. Thus, men were more likely than women to agree that there were insufficient job opportunities locally for people with their skills (16 per cent compared with 11 per cent); that they were unlikely to get a job because of their age (16 per cent compared with 12 per cent); that they were unlikely to work because of their health condition or disability (43 per cent compared with 36 per cent); and that they could not get the sort of job they would want (13 per cent compared with six per cent).

Women were more likely than men to say that they were unlikely to work because they were looking after children or the home (11 per cent compared with two per cent); and more likely to agree that their confidence about working was low (24 per cent compared with 18 per cent).

There were significant differences in perceptions about only two of these statements between respondents who said they were white and people from other ethnic backgrounds. First, recent claimants who were white were less likely than other people to say they could not get the sort of job they would want (16 per cent compared with ten per cent). Second, white respondents were more likely than people from ethnic minority backgrounds to agree that they were unlikely to get a job because of their health condition or disability (28 per cent compared with 41 per cent).

There were differences between age groups in response to many, though not all, of these perceived barriers to work. Table 7.11 shows only those where there were statistically significant differences by age. For several of these statements, there was a clear gradient (increasing or decreasing) by age group. Thus the proportion of respondents who felt they did not have the right qualifications or experience

<sup>22</sup> There were no statistically significant differences in the proportions agreeing that 'There aren't enough job opportunities locally for people with my skills', between respondents living in local authority areas with low, high or medium unemployment.

to find a job decreased by age, falling from 23 per cent among people aged under 25, to only three per cent among those aged 55 or more. In contrast, the proportion of people who felt they could not get the sort of job they would want increased with age.

The proportion agreeing that they were unlikely to get a job because of their health increased with age, rising from a quarter among young people under 25, to over half among the oldest age group. Perhaps not surprisingly, the proportion of people who believed they would not get a job because of their age increased very sharply above age 44, reaching a quarter among those aged 45 to 54 and a third among those aged 55 and over (Table 7.11).

Lack of confidence about working varied less by age than many of the other work barriers, but was much lower among people aged over 54 than younger age groups. Childcare and home responsibilities were mentioned less by older than by younger age groups (Table 7.11).

**Table 7.11 Barriers to work, by age group**

	16-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55+ %
I haven't got the right qualifications or experience to find work	23	18	14	7	3
I couldn't get the sort of job I would want	13	16	10	9	6
I am unlikely to get a job because of my age	3	2	3	23	34
I am unlikely to get a job because of my health condition or disability	24	29	42	43	56
I am unable to work because I look after children or the home	10	12	6	2	*
I am unable to work because I need to look after someone~	1	1	3	4	1
I would be worse off financially if I got a job	2	8	10	9	4
My confidence about working is low	19	25	24	25	9
<i>Base</i>	<i>180</i>	<i>186</i>	<i>230</i>	<i>258</i>	<i>233</i>

\* less than 0.5%.

~ who is frail, sick or disabled.

Columns exceed 100 per cent because respondents could agree with more than one statement.

Base: people who were not looking for or expecting to return to work.

**Table 7.12 Barriers to work by whether recent claimants had a mental health condition**

	Mental health %	Physical health conditions only %
There aren't enough job opportunities locally for people with my skills	13	15
I haven't got the right qualifications or experience to find work	14	11
I couldn't get the sort of job I would want	10	11
I am unlikely to get a job because of my age	14	16
I am unlikely to get a job because of my health condition or disability	39	44
I am unlikely to get a job because of my sickness record	15	11
I am unable to work because I look after children or the home	4	5
I am unable to work because I need to look after someone who is frail, sick or disabled	3	2
I would be worse off financially if I got a job	8	5
My confidence about working is low	33	8
None of these	11	21
Don't know	1	2
<i>Base</i>	506	535

The column exceeds 100% because respondents could agree with more than one statement.  
Base: people who were not looking for or expecting to return to work.

There were statistically significant differences for only four of the statements between people whose health conditions included mental health problems and those who had only physical conditions (Table 7.12). A higher proportion of people with mental health problems than those with only physical conditions agreed that:

- 'My confidence about working is low' (33 per cent compared with eight per cent);
- 'I am unlikely to get a job because of my sickness record' (15 per cent compared with 11 per cent); and
- 'I would be financially worse off if I got a job' (eight per cent compared with five per cent).

Meanwhile, people who only had physical health conditions were about twice as likely to say 'None of these' when presented with the list of statements (21 per cent compared with 11 per cent).

Finally, perceived barriers to work did not generally vary according to people's route onto IB. Indeed, there were statistically significant differences between

respondents in the three routes onto IB in relation to only one of the barriers. Thus, people whose route was from 'non-work' (16.7 per cent) were more likely than those from 'non-work to work' (13 per cent) and those from 'work' (nine per cent) to agree with the statement that "I don't have the right qualifications or experience to find work".

## 7.6 Literacy and numeracy problems

The decline of manufacturing and rise of services, along with the associated shift in labour demand from unskilled to skilled occupations, mean that the ability to confidently read, speak and write English, together with basic ability to use numbers and do simple arithmetic, are arguably more important than they have ever been. Problems with any of these basic skills could limit the kinds of jobs that people without work could get.

All recent claimants of IB were, therefore, asked if they had any problems with reading, writing or speaking English. Eleven per cent of them had reading problems, 12 per cent had difficulties with writing, and four per cent had problems with speaking English. However, only seven per cent had just had one literacy problem (i.e., only reading, only writing or only speaking). The net result is that, in total, 16 per cent of recent IB claimants had at least one literacy problem.<sup>23</sup>

The differences between men and women in the prevalence of self-reported literacy problems were not statistically significant. However, as Table 7.13 shows, the prevalence of literacy problems was more than three times as high among recent claimants from ethnic minority groups as among those who described themselves as white (47 per cent compared with 13 per cent). The prevalence of self-reported literacy problems decreased with age, falling from 20 per cent among young people aged under 25, to ten per cent among those aged over 54 (Table 7.13).

The prevalence of problems with reading, writing or speaking English did not vary by whether or not recent claimants had mental health or only physical conditions. However, a higher proportion of social housing tenants (21 per cent) than private tenants (17 per cent) or owner-occupiers (ten per cent) said that they had literacy problems. Literacy problems were significantly higher in areas of high unemployment (20 per cent) than in areas of either medium (13 per cent) or low (12 per cent) unemployment.

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<sup>23</sup> Comparable figures for the general population of working age people are not available. According to the *Skills for Life* survey, 16 per cent of people aged 16 to 65 have a literacy attainment that is below Level 1, which equates to the level expected of an 11 year old in the national curriculum. This refers mainly to reading rather than writing skills.

**Table 7.13 Literacy problems**

	%	<i>Base</i>
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	17	1,085
Women	14	756
<b>Age group</b>		
16 to 24	20	265
25 to 34	17	284
35 to 44	17	390
45 to 54	15	472
55+	10	424
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White	13	1,686
Other	47	155

Row percentages.

Base: all respondents.

The prevalence of literacy problems differed by work situation and expectations (Table 7.14). Recent claimants who were currently working (eight per cent) or had a job to go back to (eight per cent) were the least likely to have self-reported literacy problems. Meanwhile, people who said they were permanently unable to work because of their health condition or disability were the most likely to say that they had problems with reading, writing or speaking English (26 per cent).

**Table 7.14 Literacy problems, by work situation and expectations**

	%	<i>Base</i>
I am currently working*	8	287
I have a job to go back to	8	154
I am looking for work but have not found a suitable job	16	202
I was looking for work but stopped because my health has deteriorated	15	131
I hope to do a job in the future but have not started looking yet	15	326
I would need help, rehabilitation or training before I could consider working	19	178
I do not expect to work in the future	18	236
I am permanently unable to work because of my health condition or disability	26	248
Other+	17	79

\* Including waiting to start a new job.

+ 'Don't know' and 'I was looking for work, but stopped because I can't find one'.

Row percentages.

Base: all respondents.

Twelve per cent of recent claimants said they had 'problems with numbers or arithmetic'. Women were significantly more likely than men to self-report having numeracy problems (15 per cent compared with 11 per cent). People from ethnic minority groups were about twice as likely as those who said they were white to say they had numeracy problems (21 per cent compared with 12 per cent). The self-reported prevalence of numeracy problems declined with age, falling from 17 per cent among people aged under 35 years, to seven per cent among those aged over 54 years (Table 7.15).

**Table 7.15 Proportion of recent claimants having numeracy problems**

	%	<i>Base</i>
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	11	1,085
Women	15	755
<b>Age group</b>		
16 to 24	17	265
25 to 34	17	284
35 to 44	13	390
45 to 54	11	472
55+	7	424
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White	12	1,684
Other	21	155

Row percentages.

Base: all respondents.

Recent claimants with mental health problems were twice as likely as those with only physical conditions to report that they had problems with numbers or arithmetic (17 per cent compared with nine per cent). Social housing tenants (16 per cent) were twice as likely as owner-occupiers (eight per cent), and about as likely as private tenants (14 per cent), to have numeracy problems. Numeracy problems were higher in areas of high unemployment (15 per cent) than in areas of medium (11 per cent) or low (ten per cent) unemployment.

Finally, there was a fairly high degree of overlap between the prevalence of literacy problems and the prevalence of numeracy problems. Among recent claimants who had literacy problems, 44 per cent also had numeracy problems. And among people with numeracy problems, 55 per cent also had literacy problems. Altogether, 21 per cent of recent claimants had either literacy problems, numeracy problems or both (Table 7.16).

**Table 7.16 Prevalence of literacy and numeracy problems**

	%
Literacy but not numeracy problems	9
Literacy and numeracy problems	7
Numeracy but not literacy problems	6
Neither problem	79
Total	100
<i>Base</i>	<i>1,840</i>

Column percentages. Total may not sum to exactly 100 due to rounding.  
Base: all respondents.

## 7.7 Driving licence and access to cars

Both the possession of a driving licence and access to the use of a car can potentially influence the range of jobs that may be open to people without work. This might be especially true of disabled people who have mobility problems and face difficulty, for example, in travelling to work by public transport. More generally, some jobs require workers to hold driving licences, for example, sales representatives and delivery drivers. Lack of a driving licence may therefore hinder the labour market prospects of people with a long-term sickness or disability. Recent claimants of IB were, therefore, asked whether they held a full, current driving licence; and if they did have one, whether they had access to a car, van or motorcycle for their private use.

Fifty-six per cent of respondents reported that they held a full, current driving licence, of which 82 per cent had access to a car, van or motorcycle (henceforth 'car' for ease of exposition). In total, 46 per cent of all recent IB claimants had both a driving licence and access to a car.

Men were much more likely than women to hold a full, current driving licence (63 per cent compared with 45 per cent). The figures for Britain as a whole in 2005 were 81 per cent and 63 per cent respectively (Social Trends 2007). Among recent claimants who did have a licence, men were no more likely than women to have access to a car. Respondents who described themselves as white were more likely than other people to report having a driving licence (57 per cent compared with 46 per cent). Again, among those who had a licence, white people were not significantly more likely to have access to a car than other people.

The proportion of people who said they had a full, current driving licence increased by age group, rising from 18 per cent among those aged under 25, to 72 per cent among respondents aged over 54. But, again, among people who had a licence, age differences in access to a car were not statistically significant (Table 7.17).



**Table 7.17 Possession of a full, current driving licence, by age**

	<b>%</b>	<b><i>Base</i></b>
16 to 24	18	265
25 to 34	50	284
35 to 44	59	391
45 to 54	64	473
55+	72	424
All	56	1,837

Row percentages.

Base: all respondents.

Social housing tenants (38 per cent) were less likely than private tenants (49 per cent) and much less likely than owner-occupiers (75 per cent) to report having a driving licence. However, among those people who had a driving licence, a higher proportion of owner-occupiers (91 per cent) had access to a car than was the case for private tenants (72 per cent) or social housing tenants (71 per cent).

## 8 Conclusions

This report has presented the main findings of a survey of recent claimants of Incapacity Benefit (IB). The sample was drawn from people who had claimed IB within the previous three months. The interviews were conducted approximately six months after the claim was made. The main aims of the survey were to examine the characteristics, circumstances and perceptions of recent claimants and their routes onto IB.

It is clear from the survey that recent claimants of IB were a highly diverse group of people, perhaps even more so than those receiving other out of work benefits. However, the survey also shows that, quite apart from any health problems or disability they may have had, recent claimants of IB were rather different from the general population.

Thus, compared with the general population, recent claimants of IB were disproportionately male and drawn from among the older age groups below the State Pension age. They were also about twice as likely to be lone parents. Recent IB claimants were much less likely to be owner-occupiers than the general household population and more likely to rent their home, especially from a local council. However, they were no more likely than the general population to be from an ethnic minority.

Recent claimants of IB were also relatively disadvantaged. Compared with the general population, they were more likely to have been low paid when in work, to have worked in unskilled or low skilled occupations, and to have no work-related or academic qualifications. Recent claimants were much more likely to have literacy and numeracy problems than the general population. They were also less likely to have a full driving licence and, if they did have one, to have access to a car for their private use. These disadvantages can present significant barriers to work in an era when the demand for low skilled labour has declined (Nickell and Bell, 1995).

These disadvantages were compounded by the fact that almost all (96 per cent) recent claimants currently had, or had suffered from in the previous 12 months, health problems that affected their everyday activities. They had a diverse range of

health problems and indeed many had multiple health problems. In line with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) administrative data, mental health and musculo-skeletal were the two main types of health condition from which recent claimants suffered. Many of those who had physical health conditions also had mental health problems. In total, 30 per cent of all recent claimants suffered from anxiety or stress and 34 per cent from depression, but both of these conditions affected a larger proportion of women than of men. Altogether, around one in five (21 per cent) respondents said the cause of their main health condition or disability was related to their work (among whom about half attributed it to a work-related accident or injury).

Among recent claimants who were not in work or off sick from their job prior to their claim, approximately six out of ten (62 per cent) said that their health problem or disability had played a role in their most recent job coming to an end. Meanwhile, among those who were in paid work or off sick from their job immediately prior to their claim, almost eight out of ten (78 per cent) reported that their health condition or disability affected their ability to do their job.

A majority (69 per cent) of the employees who reported that their health or disability had affected their performance at work also said that they had discussed the problem with their employer. And the majority (67 per cent) of the people who did have such discussions, said their employer had been either fairly or very helpful. Although only about a quarter (27 per cent) of employees had access to occupational health services via their employer, seven out of ten of them had seen the service about the problem. Furthermore, almost eight out of ten (78 per cent) of those who had consulted the occupational health service reported that they had found it very or fairly helpful.

Nevertheless, only a minority (16 per cent) of employees whose health or disability affected their ability to do their work reported that any changes had been made to their job or working arrangements to help accommodate their condition. In most cases (75 per cent), employees who reported that changes had been made to their working conditions in order to accommodate their health problem or disability said that it had helped them to keep working longer than might otherwise have been possible. However, just under one in five (19 per cent) employees reported that other changes could have helped them to stay in work for longer than they did, if they had been made. Around three-fifths (58 per cent) of them had in fact asked for these other changes to be made, but apparently without success.

It is noteworthy that people who worked in the public sector or for large employers were more likely to discuss their problem with their employer, more likely to have access to occupational health via their employer, and more likely to have changes to their working conditions made, than people who worked in the private or voluntary sectors or for small organisations. This suggests that public sector employers and larger firms are better able or more willing than other organisations to discuss and respond to health problems that are affecting the ability of their staff to perform their job.

Respondents had come from a range of different employment situations immediately prior to their recent claim for IB. Just over half had been working or on sick leave from their job prior to their claim, with the remainder coming from various forms of 'non-work'. About two-thirds of the latter had previously been receiving Income Support (IS) or Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and, therefore, had effectively moved from one benefit to another. Yet, there was not a clear demarcation among recent claimants between those who had come from work (either working or on sick leave from their job) and those who were previously on out of work benefits or some other form of non-work. Some of those who were off sick from their job immediately prior to their claim were not getting sick pay or their normal pay, but were instead receiving IS or JSA. Moreover, around three out of ten (31 per cent) people coming directly from working had received one of these two out of work benefits at some point in the two years prior to their recent claim for IB.

The survey also shows that claiming IB is not necessarily a one-off experience. A substantial minority of recent claimants had claimed IB on a previous occasion. In other words, their recent route onto IB was part of a return journey. Thus, even if many never leave IB, some of those who do leave subsequently make another claim and hence there is some 'churning' among the IB caseload. This is particularly true of people who had been in temporary jobs or otherwise had a chequered employment history. It may be that their poor health made it difficult for them to keep a secure hold on the labour market. But it is also possible that their weak labour market position made them more susceptible to claiming IB. Qualitative research on routes into IB found that people in temporary jobs – including casual or seasonal work and agency working – were more likely to lose their jobs on becoming sick rather than going on a period of sick leave paid by their employer (Sainsbury and Davidson, 2006).

This churning between IB, work and non-work may be part of the broader 'low pay, no pay' cycle (Stewart, 1999)<sup>24</sup>, but one that includes a health dimension. For people in poor health, it may be a more complicated process than the more general process, one to which they are perhaps more prone than other people on the margins of the labour market, and from which it may be more difficult to escape. For this minority of recent claimants, IB is functioning as an alternative to sick pay.

Most recent claimants recalled that they initially expected to be on IB for a relatively short period – 33 per cent for less than six months and 44 per cent for less than a year – or did not know how long they might be getting this benefit (37 per cent). Only about one in ten (11 per cent) did not expect to return to work. But at the time of the interview six months after their recent claim, only 20 per cent had stopped claiming IB (a further 20 per cent had had their claim rejected and seven per cent were awaiting the outcome of their claim) rather than the 33 per cent that had anticipated leaving after that period.

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<sup>24</sup> The 'low pay, no pay' cycle refers to the situation where people move from low paid work into non-employment and back again (see Stewart, 1999).

In practice, once they had moved onto IB, recent claimants became, on the whole, more detached from the labour market. Six months after their recent claim, only a minority (14 per cent) were working. Immediately prior to their recent claim, about half (56 per cent) were either working or off sick from their job, but six months later this was the case for only about a third (36 per cent) of recent claimants. The proportion that was sick or injured with no job to return to had increased from four to 17 per cent. And the proportion that described themselves as being permanently unable to work due to sickness or disability had trebled, rising from nine per cent prior to their claim to 27 per cent in the week prior to the interview.

Thus, by the time of the survey, over a quarter of recent IB claimants saw themselves as being permanently unable to work. Among those who did not have a job (they could return to) and did not regard themselves as being permanently unable to work, two-fifths said that they were unlikely to get a job because of their health or disability. In addition, many respondents who did not have a job (they could return to) and who did not regard themselves as being permanently unable to work, had doubts about their employability. Thus, 14 per cent of them believed there were insufficient jobs in their area for people with their skills; 12 per cent said they did not have the right qualifications or experience to find work; 14 per cent believed they were unlikely to get a job because of their age; and 13 per cent thought that employers would not give them a job because of their sickness record.

What is not clear from the data is how accurately these recent claimants' perceptions reflected the reality of their potential position in the labour market. What is evident, however, is that even after a short period on IB many of them had become perceptibly more distant from the labour market. It is also clear that it was not just because of their health and their sickness record that many of them were not expecting to work in the future; it was also their age or the lack of experience, qualifications and skills that they could offer to potential employers.

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